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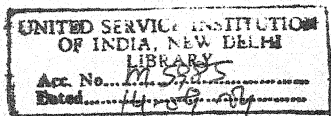
TERRIERS OF THE FLEET

# COMMISSIONED BARGEES

## THE STORY OF THE LANDING CRAFT

by

Lieutenant-Commander  
TREVOR BLORE, R.N.V.R.



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## FOREWORD

*By*

Rear-Admiral THOMAS H. TROUBRIDGE, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.,  
Fifth Sea Lord

I AM very glad to have the opportunity of writing a Foreword to this book, since I am thereby afforded the chance of paying a tribute to the many gallant young men in naval landing craft whose exploits have done so much to bring the British Army into the commanding positions it now occupies in the capitals of our enemies, and, in consequence, the war to a successful conclusion.

Every British soldier and every ton of equipment leaving these shores must go either by sea or air, and most by sea. The first seaborne arrivals in hostile territory who went in over the beaches were disembarked from specially constructed landing craft. In the course of the war large numbers of landing craft of various types were constructed and were commanded almost exclusively by officers of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. Not only have landing craft been in the forefront of the invasions of North Africa and the continent of Europe, but on many other occasions, from the bloody beaches of Dieppe to minor clashes extending from Norway to Madagascar and the Chaungs of Burma, their crews, by their steadfast valour, cool courage and splendid seamanship, have added an illustrious page to the annals of the Royal Navy.

I have had the good fortune to have been closely associated with several combined operations in which all types of landing craft were employed, and can state from personal experience that the great naval traditions, the maintenance of which means so much to this country, have been worthily upheld by the young officers and men who manned them.

The operation for the capture of the Island of Elba, with which this book is in a large measure concerned, though of comparatively minor strategical significance, was an almost perfect example of the way in which a strongly held enemy beachhead can be seized when the elements of surprise and exact timing are precisely co-ordinated. To arrive at the exact place at the exact time on a pitch-black night and, as it happened on this occasion, in the face of an intense fire, depends on a number of factors which experience and knowledge alone can produce. To these must be added the qualities of courage and tenacity of purpose, upon which success in action is always dependent. The naval forces under my command at Elba were an experienced team,

liberally endowed with the essential qualities above described and, in consequence, gained not only the great credit which was their due, but earned in addition the admiring appreciation of the French soldiers they so successfully put ashore.

Lieutenant-Commander Trevor Blore has painted a picture of an aspect of warfare the details of which are, of necessity, relatively unknown to those whose war experience has not included "Combined Operations". The long periods of waiting, the uncertainties, the intense preliminary training and, finally, the tense period of action are well described and will, I feel sure, prove of interest to the general reader, besides recalling to the initiated experiences which, though not always unhappy, will, it is to be hoped, not occur to us again.

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## CHAPTER I

### "COMMISSIONED BARGEES"

THIS is really the story of "Tackline" and "Pat". It was they who suggested it. It all began way back in Corsica, and it then looked like ending in Singapore—or even Sourabaya.

We were sitting in the wistaria-shaded Allied Officers' Club overlooking Bastia Bay, enjoying a few well-earned drinks.

"Tackline" had been in command of the flotilla of L.C.I.s (Landing Craft—Infantry), the large ones, which had borne the brunt of the enemy fire in landing the French colonial troops on the beach at Elba that very morning. And a mighty fine job he had made of it, as you will see later. "Pat" was the Commanding Officer of an L.C.T. (Landing Craft—Tank) which had followed in at a later phase of this hectic little operation. I had had the less spectacular job of looking after the Press side of the operation—shepherding and caring for a group of some twenty-odd war correspondents, seeing that their stories got through to the outside world, and censoring their copy.

As veterans of this kind of sticky job, "Tackline" and "Pat" both agreed that, at the beginning of the Elba operation, it had been one of the hottest spots which landing craft had ever encountered.

And, as we sat in comfort, sipping the local "poison"—cognac and lemon—we discussed the show from various angles. The technical, the grim, the gallant, and—inevitably—the humorous. For, however hot the corner, there is always some amusing incident to be remembered. In those strange hours of mixed elation and depression which the fighting man experiences after emerging from some corner of hell, it is the recollection of some crazy incident back there which cushions the blow of good friends gone forever. And some damned fine youngsters with whom we had been drinking only the previous evening had "bought it" that morning.

From this particular operation, which was almost exclusively the job of an Armada of landing craft, "Tackline" and "Pat" passed to reminiscences of earlier days and other operations in landing craft.

It was then that "Tackline" voiced his complaint about the lack of attention which author-blokes like myself had given these craft. Referring to the publisher's blurb about my new book, he said:

"And that's what I mean. There you've gone and written a lot of stuff about M.T.B.s and all sorts of other ships. But what about LANDING CRAFT? Nobody ever thinks to write a book about the poor bloody landing craft."

"Pat" chimed in to ask why the devil I didn't do something about it. After all, I had teamed along with the landing-craft blokes for a long time. I ought to know something about them by now. He and "Tackline" would give me plenty more material.

Then and there they began to tell me stories which gave me a deeper insight into the character of my friends of the landing craft. I was particularly delighted with the story told by "Tackline" about a Yorkshire officer who commanded a landing craft in the raid on Vaagsoe, in Norway, in earlier days. This lad from Yorkshire was seemingly the wild man of the party as far as "Tackline's" flotilla was concerned.

The landing craft had taken the Commandos in to the little Norwegian town to beat up the German garrison, destroy their installations, collect quislings and prisoners and, finally, to take off those local Norwegians who wanted to get away from Hun rule and fight for liberation. Apparently the Yorkshire lad had collected, as part of his souvenirs of the party, two Norwegian girls who thought that they could better serve their country by crossing to England.

Coming out of the fjord at the completion of this little excursion, the landing craft were being heavily sniped by German troops who overlooked the channel. "Tackline" was crouched down in his craft to avoid offering himself as a gratuitous target to the enemy snipers. The lead was flying thick and fast. Knowing "Tackline" so well, I strongly suspect him of exaggerating his account of the care he was taking to keep a whole skin. But, after all, it is "Tackline's" yarn, and this is how he told it.

"We were on the way out when my coxswain reported that we were just passing the Yorkshire lad's craft, and he was waving," said "Tackline". "I popped my head up above the coaming for a moment to take a quick look. There he was standing up on his bit of a bridge, blissfully ignoring the muck which was flying. I bobbed down again.

"Then the coxswain reported that Yorkie was closing us and seemed to want to speak to us. I poked my head up again, and saw Yorkie all ready with a megaphone in his hand. He was waving excitedly. Just then I saw something else which made me blink a bit. Two girls standing at the stern of his landing craft, seemingly oblivious to the danger of sniping, and delighted with the whole show because they were on their way to England.

"Yorkie raised his megaphone and trumpeted gleefully:

"Hey, Mac!"

"I waved acknowledgement. Again came the hail.

"Hey, Mac!!" Then Yorkie pointed at his girl passengers. 'Look, Mac!!!—CROOMPET.'"

Rich and daring were the stories which "Tackline" told that night, while "Pat" talked more soberly of such landings as Sicily, and sticky Salerno when the L.C.T.s took it on the chin. "Tackline" also spoke about the early days of Combined Ops. when he worked with the first Commandos on "smash-and-grab" raids along the French coast to collect Hun prisoners for interrogation.

Between them they got me really enthusiastic about the idea of a book for them and their hard-case brethren of the landing craft. Another round of cognacs, and "Pat" suggested a title. "Commissioned Bargees."

Damned good. “Commissioned Bargees. That was what Lord Louis once called us.”

He was speaking of an occasion when Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, then Chief of Combined Operations, bestowed this title with admiration and affection upon the young officers commanding the landing craft which constitute the key to Combined Ops. and victory.

“Tackline” grinned as he chipped in again at this stage. “You’ll have the L.C.I. boys on your trail with tommy-guns if you use that title,” he said. “They reckon they’ve got a craft a cut above the bargees of the L.C.T.s.”

Five minutes later I restored peace and goodwill with another round of lemon-cognac. But I suppose I had better make my peace with the officers and men of the L.C.I.s before the shooting starts.

I know that some of them will vehemently reject the word “bargee”, although “Tackline” let it pass. For, while the L.C.T. is frankly a barge, square and squat like a floating, elephantine bootbox, the L.C.I.s are much more elegant craft, with a good turn of speed, a bow shaped like a ship’s bow more or less, and the general appearance of a trim little ship.

So, for the benefit of those L.C.I. fanatics who might read this book and start hunting for my scalp before they reach the later chapters, let me say here and now that, if you prefer it, you can regard this chapter title as applying to your brothers of the L.C.T.s alone. Furthermore! Remember the way in which this title was bestowed and by whom. The men of 1914 might as well object to the proud title of “The Old Contemptibles”.

Two final words to prospective head-hunters from the L.C.I.s!

Don’t forget your secret shame—that sort of tram-driver’s lever which does service as a “wheel” in your trim little craft.

And anyway, this book is now devoted to the whole of the “forgotten fleet”, from minesweeping motor-launches to the little assault landing craft which head the procession of invasion.

But, having put that straight, let’s get back to Bastia. Over a last mellowing noggin of cognac, I promised to write them a book about landing craft. “Tackline” and “Pat” were mollified. We strolled out into the black, warm, still night. They set off down the hill to their craft in Bastia harbour, while I went for a stroll in the semi-tropical night to think it all over and commune with the innumerable fireflies winging their crazy, winking way through the blackness. Such a glorious, peaceful night. It was difficult to believe that some of those youngsters I prized as friends had died that morning, and that at that moment just over the dark horizon, French troops were still at death grips with the enemy. Oh hell. Snap out of it, you sentimental coot. Get on with the story of the landing-craft types.

Perhaps, before I go any further, I should introduce “Tackline” and “Pat”, of whom so much has been said already. That’s the idea. Let them stand as representatives of the thousands of lads from office desks, milk rounds, universities, schools who cheerfully left homes and



families to man, fight and command the little ships in all corners of the world. To them, in particular, goes a large share of the credit for the victory in the West, and the East.

"Tackline" is Lieutenant-Commander Ogilvy Mackenzie-Kerr, R.N.V.R., Flotilla Officer of the 257th Flotilla of L.C.I.L. (large infantry landing craft). About 30 years old, tallish, of lithe build and keen-eyed, "Tackline" has more than a modicum of that "dash, devil and drive" which some authority has given as the make-up of the good fighting man. He was "in advertising" before the war.

He was almost a founder-member of Combined Ops. He spent the first nine months of the war as an able seaman gunner in merchant ships, and then switched to the Navy as an ordinary seaman. It was just about that time that Commander Fell went hunting for likely young huskies for the newly formed Combined Ops. "Tackline" was just his meat, and soon found himself transferred to H.M.S. *Tormentor*, the Combined Ops. base ship on the south coast. Not long afterwards he got his commission and started an adventurous wartime career.

As to his nickname, he got that from a quick-witted American Army officer with whom he was discussing naval signals. When he explained that in flag signals a "tackline" served as a hyphen, the American burst in: "Hell, Mac. You've got a tackline in your name. Mackenzie-tackline-Kerr." Ever since that day Mac has been "Tackline".

"Pat" is Lieutenant W. T. Pattinson, R.N.V.R. About the same age as "Tackline" and of average build. I will always remember "Pat" for his ready smile, constant good humour and hospitality, and for his quick, alert way of looking, moving and speaking. I can just imagine "Pat" adding to that last phrase—"Except on the morning after." Generosity is his second name.

Like myself, "Pat" was a journalist before the war. His stamping ground was Bristol, where he worked for the *News Chronicle*.

There you have them. Two typical "bargees".

How's that, Tackline? What about it, Pat?

A lot of water has run under the bridges and into the gin since the night I promised you this book. But here goes at last to keep that promise.

## CHAPTER II

### "THE LEAPFROG ARMY"

You know, Pat, it was a darned funny thing that jolted my memory about the promise I made that night in Bastia. You see, when I first wrote back from the Med. and asked the Admiralty for permission to do *Commissioned Bargees* as a book, My Lords, in their infinite wisdom, said,

“No, thank you.” Hey-ho. There it went. Your book and my promise went down the drain with a splash.

But just after we returned from the South of France show, you on a stretcher and me in one piece, the gentlemen of the red distinction cloth and the stethoscope decided I was not really as husky as I looked. In the end they said, “We’ve had a good dividend out of you in the past five years,” and they gave me my pass-out check.

The demigods of Whitehall followed up with a polite letter of thanks and regrets, followed by a chit saying:

*I am commanded by My Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to inform you that you are permitted to retain the rank of Lieutenant-Commander, Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, on termination of your appointment on account of medical unfitness.*

And there I was, out in the cold, cold world, complete with one of those greatly coveted decorations—a bowler hat.

I was just recovering from the blow, and adjusting myself to the hardships of civvy street—and, believe it or not, that’s not joking—when the War House issued an announcement which jogged my memory. It was an announcement which seemed at first glance of purely military import. It gave the news that a new Army had been formed in Burma. The 12th Army, based on Rangoon.

Then I looked at the map on the wall. Yes. 12th Army. Based—Rangoon. What next? Of course! Target—Singapore! I started to study it out. It was then I thought of you and “Tackline” and the rest of the gang at Naples, Potsuoli, Anzio, Bastia and our other old stamping grounds. It was the shape of the coastline from Rangoon to Singapore that jogged my memory.

Along the island-studded coast of Tenassarim and down the Malay Peninsula lay the road to Singapore.

Geographically, the set-up kept reminding me of the long Italian peninsula, and the leapfrog landings you made there. The two great peninsulas look not unlike on the map. Malaya has not the same savage mountain chains which were the nightmare of Italy, though this is more than offset by the tough jungle terrain, the climate and the pests. Strategically, the problem at that time looked similar.

Like you chaps and the Army played a giant’s game of leapfrog from Algiers to St. Raphael, by way of Sicily, Salerno, Anzio and Elba, so, it seemed, must the Navy and the 12th Army play leapfrog down the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra to Singapore and beyond.

Right then, although there was as yet no question of the Russians stepping into the Eastern war and nobody had heard the slightest whisper of the atom bomb, there was already a lot of chatter about that war folding up dramatically. I was laying the odds, however, that you chaps would be out there before long, and doing your stuff in an even bigger way on the road to Singapore. Leading the way as usual, getting most of the kicks and damned few of the halfpence.

As it is, I suppose hundreds of our old friends will be out there for many months to come, cleaning up, mopping up, doing a thousand and one little tasks and running everyone's errands. They have had little enough kudos in the past, and will get little enough in the future. I suppose it is natural, in a way. It is the big gun which gets the big headline. The little ships, which have the toughest living conditions when things are quiet and the roughest front seat when things are sticky, is seldom in the picture.

In some ways this is understandable. There is something which stirs the mind and heart of every man, however much a landlubber, about such an Armada as the Americans and British assembled off Okinawa and Japan. Thundering battleships, gun-blazing cruisers and beehive aircraft carriers—all in one tremendous striking force to break a Jap's heart.

Scatter this mighty strength over the wide spaces of the ocean, and the picture fades. That is why the picture of the little ships must be so nebulous to the landsman, except, perhaps, when they are assembled near his own doorstep in such terrific strength as was seen for the invasion of Normandy.

Yet the little ships have been the be-all and end-all of the operations which have written finish to the Black, Brown and Yellow Fascists—the Italians, Germans and Japanese.

Perhaps it is because nobody has ever painted a picture of the job done by the little ships and the landing craft in particular that the man in the street (I've never met him outside a newspaper or a cartoon) cannot grasp what it is all about. Yet—Elba, Riviera, Salerno, Normandy, Arakan—the picture is much the same. The landing craft are the youngest branch of the Senior Service, but their battle honours in this war form a proud list. And here is the pattern to which they work:

Just try to picture this scene.

It is getting on towards dawn. Heading for a dark and silent beach a motor-launch threads its quiet way towards the first landing point, perhaps through thick-sown inshore minefields laid by the enemy. Behind the launch follow the square, boxlike assault craft—the L.C.A., spearhead of the spearhead. The Commandos, the "killers", are going in to prepare the way.

Already other M.L.s have begun to sweep the channels through the minefields, passages of safety for the swarms of landing vessels of all shapes and sizes which lie out there in the darkness of the assembly area. Out there are the elephantine landing ships—dwarfing the L.C.I. and the L.C.T. They jockey around in the blackness, waiting their turn to head inshore, their cue to step on the stage of war.

Meanwhile the L.C.T. (Rocket) have moved into position to deliver their initial, pulverizing barrage on enemy strongpoints. Suddenly these weird Chinese-dragon craft, squat and ugly waterbeetles, burst into life with a roaring fireworks display as their banks of high-power rockets go hurtling towards the enemy.

Now the "show" is on.

More L.C.(A.) go racing towards the beach. L.C.(F.), Landing Craft Flak, stand close inshore and let loose with their Oerlikons, pom-poms and general devil's chorus. A bit farther out cruise the similar, squat L.C.(G.), Landing Craft—Gun, bombarding enemy gun positions, duelling with the enemy gunners.

Now the motor-launches equipped for making smokescreens, and those queer smoke-making landing craft dominated by whirring aeroplane propellers mounted on steel legs at their stern are swinging into action.

Already the big and little infantry landing craft are speeding shorewards with their cargoes of first-wave troops. First light is growing. And now the enemy is letting loose with everything he has got, hammering at the landing craft with guns and mortars.

Pandemonium has broken loose, smoke, flames, an ear-splitting racket of gunfire and small arms. A seeming hellish confusion. But in each of those little craft are young naval officers and ratings, mainly mere boys, who each knows his own little part in the big plan, is trained to concert pitch and knows what to do in any emergency.

Soon the infantry have won the beaches, and the combined Navy and Army teams have established a beach organization. The tank landing craft, whose officers are Lord Louis' "commissioned barges", lose no time in nosing their way to the beach. As at Salerno these awkward, ugly ducklings will discharge their vital cargoes of fighting vehicles, come hell or highwater.

And, finally, the L.S.(T.), the Landing Ships—Tank, are steaming in to open their huge bow doors on some convenient beach, shelf or pier-like pontoon, and disgorge their streams of vehicles, from tanks to jeeps.

Back and forth run the small landing craft, bringing still more men and supplies ashore, carrying dispatches and performing a multitude of other tasks. The new invasion is under way.

That is the way I have seen it before. That is just about the way it will be again—on the road to Singapore.

And not far behind the landing craft will steam the destroyers to give close gunfire support to the troops ashore. Then, with supremacy in the air attained, the cruisers and battleships will follow with their devastating broadsides, and trailing their smokescreens of limelight whether they like it or not.

Of course there are plenty of variations in the pattern. This particular pattern was partly painted from the Elba invasion, Operation Brassard, and partly from the Riviera invasion. But as an overall picture it is intended to convey the pattern of an operation.

And don't forget that this is just the beginning. After the landing craft have done their rough job, they stay on the spot to carry out the build-up and do any "stooge job" which crops up, running messages or carrying passengers indefinitely. The destroyers have called themselves the "maids of all work". They don't know what it means. They are

aristocrats compared with the Cinderella landing craft—I almost said Ugly Ducklings.

For, in many ways, the craft themselves are Ugly Ducklings to the eyes of all but good landing-craft types.

Born of Necessity out of Disaster, the landing craft is one of the major miracles of the modern navy.

The first specially designed armoured landing craft was produced by the Combined Operations Development Centre at Portsmouth, a unit which was formed in 1936.

Describing this original armoured landing craft, the official book, *Combined Operations*, says:

It carried thirty-six men in addition to a naval crew, and drew only nine inches forward. It was self-propelled, proof against rifle and machine-gun fire, and could be carried at the davits of a merchant ship. The factors governing the design of such craft, whether they are to land troops, tanks, vehicles or artillery, correspond to the requirements for success. These are—speed in getting on to the beaches, protection during the process, ability to put troops ashore on as wide a front as possible, the provision of covering fire during the assault and the maintenance of supplies in its early stages. Craft such as these are far from handy; their blunt bows which open to release down hinged ramps the men, tanks or vehicles are ill fitted to plough through a head sea, and their flat bottoms make them poor sea boats in rough or even choppy water. They are of several kinds and dimensions, and are powered mostly by American engines.

In contrast to the blunt-nosed assault craft, there is the personnel landing craft of American construction. It is a motor vessel, fast and seaworthy; but it is of small size and has no armour. It is used mostly at night.

Landing craft are carried by infantry landing ships, originally known as assault ships, of which many were employed in the days of peace in the less hazardous task of carrying travellers on their lawful occasions to ports all over the world. When on an operation they are escorted by various types of motor gunboat, motor torpedo-boat and motor-launch. These are fast—some of them very fast—and they make up what are known as our Light Coastal Forces. Their exploits have been described in many Admiralty communiques. Behind them are the destroyers, detailed to act as covering forces, if necessary; and behind these, ultimately, is the Home Fleet.

So much for the birth of the landing craft. They have made enormous strides since that was written anonymously by Hilary Saunders during days of devotion to Combined Ops.

Here were the new little ships. Now to find the men to sail them and fight them. As the landing craft were a revolution in sea-going as well as in sea-fighting, it was necessary to find a revolutionary kind of sailor, a completely new kind of sailor.

Ever since the day when the first man paddled the first coracle, and the first mariner was born, it has been a great sin to strand a ship. The idea of intentionally stranding a ship, call it "beaching" or any other fancy modern name you like, seems unnatural to a true seaman. It sounds something disgraceful—like scuttling or barratry. And did not every mariner and every Englishman sneer when the *Graf Spee* was scuttled after the Battle of the Plate?

With quite a clear conscience and as an "amateur" officer of the R.N.V.R. I discovered this myself early in the war. My anti-submarine



EARLY DAYS: Commandos, coming off after the giant raid on Dieppe, seen with one of their naval "oppos," on board assault landing craft.



BACK FROM THE RAID: Assault landing craft bring back the troops and German prisoners captured in the raid which destroyed the important German Radar station at Bruneval, France.

trawler, H.M.S. *St. Loman*, was badly damaged by collision in the North Sea one dark winter's night in 1940. We managed to bring her into Aberdeen in a sinking condition. The only sizeable "pontoon" dock in that port was full, but the *St. Loman* must be examined and patched urgently. The only thing to do was, in obedience to orders, to put her up on a sandbank where she would "dry out" at the bottom of one tide and be refloated by the next high.

Yet, as I passed the quite proper order: "Stand by to beach ship", I could not help thinking that it was unnatural and only to be contemplated on such a special occasion as this.

How much more difficult was it to reconcile professional naval officers, imbued with a horror of stranding ship, to the fundamental idea of a landing craft. A ship intended to be beached. It was hard to convince a died-in-the-wool mariner that there was as much skill in beaching one of these craft so that it could complete its work, and then haul off to sail again. How to beach, when to beach and how long to remain aground, how best to use a kedge anchor and many other little tricks of beaching were yet to be learned as a new art.

"The business of keeping a ship beached but not stranded, shuffling in on its belly up and down the shore while it is being loaded or unloaded, possibly under fire, is no game for any but the trained," said an official document. The men to do this job must be found and trained from scratch. And who better than the unprofessional seaman—"the gentleman trying to be a sailor", as the R.N.V.R. have been jocosely defined.

These peacetime students, clerks, journalists, butchers, bakers and candlestick makers had no innate prejudices. They were the men for the training and the job.

And so a new and revolutionary type of mariner was born to man, sail and fight the new and revolutionary type of ship.

Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten is probably regarded by the general public as the father of the landing craft. It was under his regime at Combined Ops. that they began to blossom forth in the public gaze. I would rather say that Lord Louis brought landing craft to fruition. They were certainly one of the finest flowers of Combined Ops., but, as I said earlier, Combined Ops. were born of Disaster out of Necessity, or the other way round if you prefer. That was in the days when Lord Louis was a very fine destroyer officer who had the natural horror of a mariner at the idea of stranding his ship.

The original idea of Combined Ops., to harry the more powerful enemy right on his own doorstep, to distract him and damage him, had historic sanction. Did not Drake "sing the King of Spain's beard"? Only the method was really new.

The creation of a Combined Operations Development Centre in 1936 showed that the Navy was far from unaware of the shape of things to come, but it was not until 1940 that the urgency arose.

The collapse of France, leaving Britain to stand alone behind her great anti-tank ditch, the English Channel and the Straits of Dover, put a terrific urge into the organization for combined operations. It



was not the British nature to stand immobile behind this ditch and await attack. It was the nature of the British to carry the war to the enemy, if only in the form of sea-borne patrols and skirmishes, to harry and discomfort the enemy in places where he felt safe.

This was no job for the Army, the Navy or the Air Force in their respective spheres. It was a job for the best warriors of the nation in close combination. As the officially anonymous book *Combined Operations* well expresses it:

With this end in view, a Combined Operations Command was formed, whose personnel consists of officers and other ranks of the three Fighting Services. Its primary function is to provide training for amphibious warfare, which comprises all kinds of offensive action from small raids to large assault landings.

And this was before the invasion of North Africa and long before Normandy.

It is also the task of this Command to plan and execute raids on the coasts of the enemy. . . .

The Combined Operations Command . . . produces the craft and the weapons; but above and beyond all else it seeks to foster the spirit of co-operation in all fighting men, united as they are by the danger and glory of their calling. In so doing it is creating in its Combined Training Centres, sailor-soldiers, soldier-sailors, airmen-soldiers who have a complete understanding of each other's methods and problems. The Combined Operations Command has its own troops, of which the Commandos form a part. . . .

In this official book Mr. Hilary St. John Saunders focuses upon the romantic Commandos. I think he has missed the mark. I earnestly maintain that the be-all and end-all of Combined Ops. are the lads of the landing craft.

Britain was lucky to have in these days of peril a Prime Minister with a fine imagination and an indomitable fighting spirit. The idea of a rip-roaring outfit like Combined Ops. appealed to him, and also to Sir John Dill, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Now Lieutenant-Colonel D. W. Clarke, of the Royal Artillery, the true father of Combined Ops., and thereby the father of landing craft, came upon the scene. He was on the Army Staff, and he received the order to prepare a plan for this new type of warfare by sea, land and air. His qualification for this job was considerable experience of the guerilla tactics practised by the Arabs during the disturbances in Palestine. Seeing the parallel with the tactic of the Boers in their hour of disaster, the name of Commando, originating with the Boer guerilla units, was chosen for the all-in fighters who were to form the landwards spearhead of the new force. Apparently nobody thought of coining a nice, romantic name for the new kind of sailors who were to put these Commandos ashore and supply and support them.

And so the three Fighting Services got together to study, plan, practise and execute the new kind of warfare to the greater discomfiture of friend Fritz, the egregious "Eyetic" and the sinister Jap.

This close integration of the three Services was well demonstrated in the major “raid” on Dieppe in August, 1942. On that occasion an Army sergeant took command when the entire naval personnel of one landing craft were knocked out, and he brought that little assault landing craft all the way back from Dieppe to England.

So, under the spur of urgency, Combined Ops. grew up fast. With them grew the little fleet, the fleet of landing craft, the navy of landing craft.

Again I must quote from *Combined Operations*:

As with the soldiers, so with the sailors. They are trained to handle the strange diversity of craft used to put the Army ashore, take it off after a raid and keep it supplied when on shore. These craft are of curious and unexpected shape. Some of them, such as the assault landing and the tank landing craft, look like oblong floating boxes of steel, and bear as much resemblance to the ordinary conception of a boat as a tank does to a motor-car.

Yes, Lieutenant-Colonel Clarke, of the Royal Artillery, built the very excellent foundations.

And little time was lost in putting his blueprint into effect. In June, 1940, while France lay prostrate and dazed, the first small raids were launched. Winston Churchill, the fighting Premier, looked round for a fighting leader, and found him in Lieutenant-General Sir Alan Bourne, the Adjutant-General of the Royal Marines.

As to the naval side of the job, Captain Garnons-Williams, D.S.C., R.N., was given the task of collecting as many suitable small craft as possible, and finding the officers and men suitable to man them on these desperate ventures. For a start there were no flotillas of specially designed and built landing craft. In the main they were private motor-boats which had to be adapted as best they could be for their new fighting job. The officers and ratings were mainly found from the ranks of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, and to a lesser degree from the R.N.R. and among the hardy fishermen of Britain.

At last, under the naval direction of Lieutenant-Commander J. W. F. Milner-Gibson, R.N., the first Combined Ops. raid took place between Boulogne and Berck, on the coast of France, on the night of June 23, 1940. It was a confused affair involving the landing of some two hundred men, but as a beginning and experiment, it was a success. The Commandos scared the living daylights out of the Huns, and brought back some valuable military information. And the Hun, who had thought Britain almost as prostrate as France, did some hard thinking. The return of one of the boats independently to a British port caused an hilarious incident which I quote from the official account:

Their reception was mixed. At one port, those on board a boat were refused permission to enter the harbour, as no one was sure of their identity. They lay off the boom, covered by the guns on shore, wet through and, after a time, slightly intoxicated by the contents of two jars of rum which, fortunately for them, were on board. Their troubles did not end when they got on shore, for they were then arrested by the Military Police who took them for deserters.

The next raid took place on Guernsey about a month later, when the Commandos had a surprisingly uneventful time. Other subsequent raids on the Channel Islands netted some useful prisoners for interrogation. But right now Combined Ops. was just beginning to toddle.

Then, on July 17, 1941, that enterprising old warrior, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes, later to become Baron Keyes of Zeebrugge and Dover in token of his great services in the First World War, became Director of Combined Operations, with General Sir Alan Bourne as his Second-in-Command. This was the signal for planning more ambitious raids for execution as soon as the necessary ships and men were available and trained, though it was not until March, 1941, that the first of these larger ventures was undertaken. This was a highly successful raid on the Lofoten Islands, way up the coast of Norway.

This was an historic occasion for Combined Ops. and also for the landing craft. Included in the naval force under Captain C. Caslon, R.N., were two infantry landing ships which carried the new assault landing craft for putting the Commandos ashore and bringing them off again.

The next great step in Combined Ops. was marked by the appointment of Captain the Lord Louis Mountbatten, G.C.V.O., D.S.O., then one of our most able and daring destroyer officers, as successor to Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes. For this appointment he was immediately promoted to the rank of Commodore First Class, and, a few weeks later, to Acting Vice-Admiral with the title of CHIEF of Combined Operations. At the same time he became an honorary Lieutenant-General and honorary Air Marshal.

With Lord Louis at the helm, things began to hum in Combined Ops. The first big raid planned under his direction was the pretty little job of Vaagso, when German installations were destroyed, the Hun was routed in some fierce street fighting, prisoners and quislings were captured, Norwegian patriots picked up—and a good time was had by all.

So, under the dynamic personality of Lord Louis Mountbatten, Combined Ops. marched on from strength to strength.

Vaagso—Bruneval—St. Nazaire of very glorious memory—Madagascar—and so to Dieppe.

Combined Ops. had grown up, and with it had grown the landing-craft fleet.

Around this time there was much heart-burning in Whitehall. Lord Louis had his headquarters established in Richmond Terrace, almost opposite Downing Street and the Cenotaph. This was a happy, unorthodox beehive of the three Services, which I will remember for its excellent amenities, including the best bar in Whitehall.

From the greyness of their "old-established firms" in the Admiralty, the "War House" and the Air Ministry, more orthodox senior officers muttered among themselves about these "upstarts" of Richmond Terrace.

“Dammit, sir. They seem to be setting up as a Fourth Service. Damned independent and all that.”

But the new type of warfare called for new brains, new blood, new equipment, new material. And Lord Louis saw that it was forthcoming for his Commandos, his paratroops and his “Commissioned Bargees”. After all he had the full backing of that incorrigible cigar-smoking battler of Downing Street.

So, when Lord Louis left for his big new appointment as Generalissimo of the South-East Asia Command, Combined Ops. was a large and thriving concern with a Mountbatten dynamo to keep it running.

And by the time victory arrived there had grown out of the civilian motor-boats of the first days of Combined Ops. a great fleet of weird craft, some of American origin, ranging from those quaint sea monsters, the L.S.T., or Landing Ship—Tank, to the Landing Barge, Kitchen, the L.V.T.s., better known as “Buffalos” and the DUKWS, or “Ducks”, a useful amphibious motor-lorry.

As to their jobs, I cannot think of much that a landing craft has not done. I have just been making out a rough list of duties performed by landing craft of all varieties.

1. Putting assault troops on a beach, and taking them off again in case of mere raids.
2. Carrying troops, vehicles and supplies for an invasion.
3. Minesweeping.
4. Rescuing prisoners of war.
5. Bombarding the enemy with rockets, guns, mortars and “hedgehog” or “hedgerow” projectiles.
6. Bringing wounded out of a battle area. Both at Elba and Normandy some L.C.I.s were fitted up as “floating field hospitals”.
7. Ferrying refugees—as in the Adriatic.
8. Crossing rivers. Away in the heart of the Continent landing craft flew the White Ensign at the crossing of the Rhine. L.V.T.s (Buffalos), L.C.M.s and L.C.V.P.s—landing craft mechanized and landing craft vehicle (personnel) to be more explicit, ferried troops and fighting vehicles and supplies across the great German river in the decisive assault.
9. Fire-fighting.
10. Salvage and repair duties.
11. Equipped as floating kitchens for minor landing craft in such an operation as Operation Neptune—or the Normandy invasion.
12. Running NAAFI supplies to Anzio from Naples. A floating canteen.
13. Supplying emergency electric supply. L.C.T.606 was fitted out as a floating powerhouse for emergency supply up the Tiber should we find need of it on arrival in Rome.
14. Smoke-laying.

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15. "Cloak and Dagger" missions. Landing or taking off agents and similar secret work up the Adriatic.
16. Harbour duties, including running mail, signals or messages, and serving as boats between ship and shore.

There are probably more things which landing craft have done in this war, but I cannot remember them now. At any rate I can give more specific details of these jobs as I go on.

One difficulty in writing about these craft is their own alphabet, which has developed as the fleet grew. Perhaps at this stage it would be wise to give some details and descriptions of the main categories of the craft.

*L.C.T.—Landing Craft, Tank.*—Of the larger landing craft this looks the most ungainly of all. It looks something like a large emergency water tank, such as were installed in English cities to cope with air-raid fires, pushed by the stern section of some little coastal steamer, complete with short funnel, superstructure and bridge. The dimensions vary with the "mark" or type, of which the following are two:

160 feet long and 31 feet beam.

187 feet long by 38 feet 9 inches beam.

Its armament consists of two Oerlikons, those light, handy, vicious little guns with the .8 explosive bullet which seem fright-making to the Luftwaffe.

*L.C.I.(L)—Landing Craft, Infantry (Large).*—Neat little motor-yacht-like craft, with blunt but rounded bows, on either side of which steel ramps or gangways can be run out to a beach. The forward deck has screens of armour plating to protect troops waiting to disembark. Amidships are the navigational and living quarters, with tiny wardroom, chartroom, wheelhouse and bridge. Aft the bridge is a small boat deck. Below are three "troop spaces", great cavernous holds either fitted with wooden benches like garden seats or tiers of canvas bunks, providing accommodation for about 240 troops. Later types dispense with outside ramps and have bow doors which open something like the doors of an L.S.T. (Landing Ship, Tank) in miniature.

Dimensions: 158½ feet by 23¾ feet.

Armament: Four or five Oerlikons.

Complement: Two officers and seventeen ratings.

*L.C.H.* and *L.C.Q.* are variations on the ordinary *L.C.I.(L)*, having the forward deck covered in, plenty of wireless and radar and similar equipment installed, and troop spaces converted into mess decks, and a spacious wardroom for the officers and ratings forming the staff of the senior officer directing an operation from such a headquarters landing craft.

I have thought of these craft as being capable of assisting in solving

the British housing problem, for, with their engines removed, they would provide a capacious houseboat which could even be converted into two goodly flats. I found, however, that I could not buy one from the Admiralty as they are all American-built and are lease-lend to Britain.

*L.C.I.(S)—Landing Craft, Infantry (Small).*—These are a very different proposition to their bigger sisters, being much faster, and in design like a motor-launch covered in, armoured and fitted to carry troops, with a capacity for approximately 100 men.

Dimensions: 105 feet long by  $21\frac{1}{2}$  feet beam.

Armament: Two Oerlikons.

Complement: Two officers and fifteen men.

*L.C.S.(L)—Landing Craft, Support (Large).*—Miniature gunboats.

Dimensions: 105 feet by  $21\frac{1}{2}$  feet.

Armament: One six-pounder quick-firing gun, one four-inch smoke mortar, two Oerlikons, and twin Vickers .5 in a power turret.

Complement: Two officers and fourteen men, with nine Royal Marines as gunners.

*L.C.A.—Landing Craft, Assault.*—Like floating bootboxes pretending to be motor-boats, mere square shells for carrying troops.

Dimensions: 41 feet by 10 feet.

Armament: Two Army mortars, stripped Lewis guns and revolvers.

Complement: One officer and two or three ratings.

*L.C. Support.*—There are two types, something like the L.C.A. but fitted with guns and some protective armour plating to give close support to the L.C.A.s.

Dimensions: 47 feet by  $12\frac{1}{2}$  feet or 41 feet by 10 feet.

Armament: (a) One two-pounder pompom, twin .5 machine-guns, a smoke mortar and stripped Lewis guns. (b) Twin .5s and a smoke mortar.

*L.C.V.(P)—Landing Craft, Vehicle (Personnel).*—A larger floating bootbox, with higher sides and the square bow consisting of a door which lowers on a beach to form a ramp. Is built to carry vehicles and troops.

Dimensions:  $36\frac{1}{2}$  feet by  $10\frac{3}{4}$  feet.

*L.C.E.—Landing Craft, Engineering.*—An L.C.V. converted and equipped for the work of emergency repairs and salvaging of damaged minor landing craft such as L.C.A.s and L.C.V.s.

*Landing Barges (Vehicle, Flak and Kitchen).*—Resemble Thames lighters fitted out for war duties.

I have purposely left those major landing craft, L.C. Flak, L.C.T. Gun and L.C.T. (Rocket), until the last. They are all based on the hull of the large L.C.T.

*L.C. Flak.*—Converted L.C.T.

Dimensions: 194 feet by 31 feet.

Armament: Four or eight Oerlikons with eight or four two-pounder pompoms.

Complement: Two officers and eighteen men, with two officers and fifty men of the Royal Marines to provide the gunners.

*L.C.G.(L).*—*Landing Craft, Gun (Large).*—Again a converted L.C.T.

Dimensions: 192 feet by 31 feet.

Armament: Two 4-inch or 4.7-inch guns, two Oerlikons, two pompoms.

Complement: Two officers and ten ratings, with one officer and twenty-two men of the Royal Marines to man the guns.

*L.C.T. (Rocket).*—An L.C.T. with superimposed deck to which rows of rocket projectors, reminding me of dragon's teeth at first sight, are fixed. Her rockets, numbering between 790 and 1,044, are fired electrically in salvos. She has a complement of two officers and fifteen men. When she opens fire all hands except the commanding officer at the firing mechanism, in a protected position, must be below decks to avoid the sheet of flame which the rockets throw out. The Rocket Craft is checked in its stride by the recoil from these rockets.

It was only with the invasion of Normandy that this "secret weapon" was revealed to the world. It provides an excellent example of the evolution of a landing craft for a special job.

These rocket craft were developed by Combined Operations Headquarters to provide the strongest possible close support for the assault craft and troops as they approached the beach.

The problem was closely studied in the spring of 1942, when planning was begun for the eventual invasion of the Continent. It was then realized that unless some new weapon could be devised the troops would have no close fire support at the critical moment of assault, except what could be provided by a small support craft with twin .5s. The Army's normal weapons, such as Medium and Field Artillery, could not be employed because they would still be afloat in the landing craft and ships. Gunfire from warships standing farther out could give powerful support in the early stages, but would have to be "lifted" in good time before the assault waves touched down, in order to avoid causing casualties among our own ranks. What was required was some weapon which would lay down a really devastating fire on the beach defences at the last possible moment to daze the enemy, undermine his

morale and make him keep his head down while our troops landed and stormed across the beaches.

This lesson was brought home forcibly by the large raid on Dieppe in the summer of 1942, which was a test of the blueprint for invasion. This showed plainly that far more fire support from the sea was necessary for troops tackling strongly defended beaches.

Many ideas were studied at Combined Ops., providing a number of innovations such as field guns mounted on landing craft, as in the case of the L.C.G. But the most novel idea was the rocket craft. This was designed to throw such a weight of explosive on the beach with such intensity that it would shatter enemy positions and stun the defenders until the assault troops were upon them.

Only after months of discussion and argument to convince the more orthodox of officers was the first of these rocket craft ordered from the shipyards. In April, 1943, the first specimen was ready for its first trial.

There was plenty of doubt and anxiety about the first test. Would the electric panel discharge these tremendous salvoes, and would the craft itself stand up to the shock of discharge. Came the great day. The rockets went off and the craft did not sink. The only casualty was an officer from Combined Ops. headquarters, an officer closely connected with the development of the rocket craft. He had his hair, eyebrows and moustache singed off by the blast from the rockets.

So six craft were quickly adapted from L.C.T.s and sent out to the Mediterranean to take part in the landing on Sicily. I first saw them at Algiers. They certainly worked for that operation. Some Italian garrisons were so shaken to the core by the blanket of rockets, each with the blast effect of a five-inch shell, that they surrendered without showing any real resistance. Most of these Italians were stunned or “bomb happy” when collected as prisoners.

So many more of these craft were ordered for the invasion of North-West Europe, and designed to carry an even greater number of rockets, all of which could be fired in a period of some thirty seconds at a considerable range.

The effect of these rockets falling in a small area is such that the fire from one craft is approximately equivalent to the fire of thirty regiments of artillery or thirty cruisers, each mounting twelve six-inch guns, when related to the time over which the bombardment takes place.

There is a vivid flash when the salvo is fired and the rockets rush through the air with that curious sound of rustling dustbins which blitz-era Cockneys will remember from the anti-aircraft rocket batteries protecting London. The visual effect at the time of firing when seen in the darkness before dawn caused me to christen them the Chinese Dragon Ships. The flight of the rockets can be followed quite easily with the naked eye until just before they strike. A few seconds later they detonate on the enemy beach positions with an appalling crash. The earth seems to quiver and clouds of smoke fountain into the air.



With such a terrific cargo of explosive on deck, the dangers from direct hits from the enemy as the craft approaches the beach are greater than the normal; but such risks are cheerfully accepted from the result obtained.

While I was collecting these technical details from the experts, I also asked for some outstanding dates in the development of landing craft.

The first time a tank was put ashore by a landing craft was at Herjangs Fjord, Norway, in April, 1940, when L.C.M. No. 1 landed a tank.

The first properly equipped amphibious operation was against the Lofoten Islands in March, 1941, when six L.C.A. and L.C.M. were carried in Infantry Assault Ships, later to be named Landing Ships, Infantry.

The first large-scale opposed amphibious operation was the Dieppe raid in August, 1942.

The first landing (invasion as opposed to raid) since the Norwegian campaign was the landing in North Africa. This was the first major test of landing craft and they came through with flying colours.

So there you have it. A brief history of the birth and growth of the landing craft, and some technical details for those who like facts and figures.

(By the way, I wonder what was the first landing craft. Perhaps those craft which brought the Norse and Danish "Commandos" storming across the North Sea to raid the real, original English then inhabiting this Island, but long since extinct.)

So now let us go and visit a few landing-craft types. Just one little warning before we go. If I seem to wander away from the landing craft from time to time, to spin a yarn or take a run ashore, don't worry. We'll get back to them. Let's go.

## CHAPTER III

### NEAPOLITAN INTERLUDE

BACK from North Russia. Off to the Mediterranean. The Navy had Mr. Thomas Cook and his boys licked as a travel agent. Oh well, it was good-bye to Gizi and Tessa again. But, like thousands of others all over the world, they were starting to get used to having a husband and daddy on the instalment plan.

This time the Mediterranean was not an unknown quantity. There would be plenty of the old gang out there still—particularly my old comrades of the landing craft. The parting with home was just as bloody, but the arrival at the other end would be less bewildering. Trouble

with this man's Navy is that if you are a newcomer to a new base, they never seem to expect you, and muck about until you get fighting mad about the seeming inadequacy of local accommodation and arrangements in general. But when you are returning to old friends it is plenty of fun, and you know the ropes so that they cannot palm you off with a dud cabin.

I had a pretty good guess what was in store for me this time. It was obvious that the long predicted invasion from the West was not so far ahead. Yet why was I being banished to the Mediterranean just when the big adventure was looming over the horizon? I had a pretty good guess, and some strong hints also, that the invasion from the West was not the only shot in the Allied locker. I was to be the Navy's bear-leader for war correspondents on the supplementary invasion of the Continent from southern France.

This time, however, there were months to spare. So there was no question of rushing out by air, as I had done for the invasion of Sicily. I was to have my first experience of life in a crowded troopship.

Yes, I know this has nothing to do with landing craft, but for me it was the road back. And anyway, it was mighty interesting. It was something like travelling in a human Noah's Ark.

One typically grey winter's morning found me in that grey city—Liverpool. I was due on board the troopship at the landing stage at 12.30 p.m. at the latest, and the "locals" did not open until 12 noon.

Two sad truths I knew. The first was that my favourite hobby, good old English beer, was in very short supply in the Mediterranean. The second was that, after earlier experiences, the powers-that-be wisely decreed that all troopships should be dry. A dreadfully dry ten days lay ahead of me.

So 12 noon found me straining at the leash outside that excellent Liverpool hostelry, "The Hole in the Wall", where the beer, the tankards and the surroundings are equally pleasant. Twenty minutes I had to stow away those half a dozen last sweet pints, and then leg it like blazes for the landing stage.

With a fast dissolving and already nostalgic flavour on the palate, I boarded s.s. *Noah's Ark* just before she hauled out into the River Mersey. For reasons of personal security, I will not identify this trooping liner much closer. I did recognize her as an old friend of the England-Australia run. In the days of my journalistic apprenticeship as a reporter on the *Melbourne Herald*, way back in 1928, I used to board her in search of news.

Now she was in good grey war paint, and fitted as a trooper. That is to say that she was equipped to carry two or three times as many passengers as her designers ever contemplated—a floating sardine tin. Therein lay her interest.

Never do I expect to see such a conglomeration of uniforms in a confined space, not even in the British Officers' Club at Naples, where I was once entranced by the shoulder "flash" of one khaki-clad figure reading: "Vauxhall Liaison Engineer".

At a glance there was every kind of human being on board s.s. *Noah's Ark*, every shape and size, young and old. That was interesting enough for me. But the variety of uniforms was the real fascination. Both by officers, ratings and other ranks were the Navy, Army and Air Force, not forgetting the Royal Marines, well represented. There was also a good leavening of Wrens, Waafs and A.T.S. The United States Army was mainly represented by the uniformed cast of the big show, "This is the Army", including one magnificent Negro with the physique of Jack Dempsey and the voice of Paul Robeson. The French Army and Air Force had representatives on board, and there was also a lone Norwegian naval officer, a lieutenant-commander with a perfect command of the English language and a man of considerable culture. Among the naval contingent was Captain H. Taprell Dorling, D.S.O., the famous naval author better known as "Taffrail". Then there were the nursing sisters of the three Services. The shoulder "flashes" of the Army were the "nameplates" of some famous fighting units. Interesting, but natural enough. That was only the beginning for a collector of human specimens.

Not surprisingly there were the ladies of the NAAFI, some of them wearing the ever-to-be-honoured badge of the W.V.S., the Women's Voluntary Service, which gave more in service and sacrifice for no pay than any other unit I know. Nor were the ladies of the Y.M.C.A. much more out of place. But at last you came to the rarer specimens.

It was a bit of a shock to turn the corner of an alleyway and run into a uniformed lady bearing the label "Catholic Women's League". There were more organizations in this war than I had heard of. There were the gentlemen wearing the flash of "Toc H", and, alone in his glory, a little trumpet-player labelled "Ensa".

What a wonderful human zoo it was to be sure. Seen at its best at feeding time, with its three sessions for every meal.

I spent quite an amusing ten days studying this amazing mass of labelled humanity in all its cliques, coteries and convolutions. It filled in the time on a dull convoy, where the only break in a day of eating, lazing, reading and sleeping was the morning parade at boat-stations. Plodding along down into sunnier latitudes, past Gibraltar and once more in the Med., with an occasional gin or beer in the cabin of the First Officer, who obviously deserved the medal for saving life at sea.

At last Algiers, with its old friends and old haunts. This Paris of North Africa still housed the Allied Forces Headquarters for a war which was already being fought hundreds of miles away in Italy on the other side of the Mediterranean. So I found some of the old brigade still stranded in this backwater of the war. This was not my destination this time. Already the White Ensign was a rarity in Algiers harbour, where the French tricolour flew dominantly once more. This was just a place to spend a few days in changing ships, an oasis in the desert of travel by dry transports. Although it was now merely the resort of very senior officers and their satellites, it was surprisingly little changed from the good old days of Sicily. It seemed more like yesterday than

last year when I stepped back into the C.-in-C. Staff Mess at the Hotel Terminus, libellously and ribaldly called the Hotel Verminous. And the same junior officers, birds of passage like myself, were still raising the same justifiable moans about their transit Mess in the Ecole Inferieur et Terrible, or the White Kasbah as I christened it.

This place, with its grim stone basement dormitories, and a general atmosphere of the ante-room to limbo, was the subject of much rueful merriment among its transient inhabitants marooned in Algiers on their funereal route to Italy, Alexandria, East Africa or India.

I was invited to go "slumming" by some of the junior officers who had come out in the *Noah's Ark* and been parked at this concentration camp.

At luncheon there I am convinced that I tasted dehydrated camel for the only time in my life. It was a feverish coloured mince, and I could not help remarking that it would have been a bit tastier if they had taken the hide off the camel before they dehydrated it.

A few days in Algiers—then on to Naples. My last night at the Hotel Terminus with old cronies saw considerable consumption of Algerian wine, both red and white, respectively known to this Mess as "Red Infuriator" and "Jungle Juice". So it was with gritty eyeballs, butterflies in the tummy and a scalp which opened and shut like a fly trap that I climbed on board a Polish infantry landing ship now serving as a transport in the Med.

At the head of the gangway I was greeted by a young sub-lieutenant, a New Zealander, who gave me one discerning look, and announced, "I know what you need, sir." Without further ado, he conducted me to his cabin and poured out a few stiff gins and some cooling beers. I might have known he was a "landing-craft type", being one of the officers of the assault landing craft carried by this ship. Only a "landing-craft type" could have had such a discerning eye and generous heart.

As it turned out that was the wettest "dry transport" I ever expect to meet. Not only were the landing-craft lads serving in her most generous with their rations, but my cabin companion, an older type of R.N.V.R. lieutenant, had one suitcase completely fitted out as a portable cocktail bar.

So it was in good spirit that I reached Naples a few days later.

I felt a great interest in Naples. When I had first left my home in Australia back in 1927 to roam the world, Naples had been the first foreign city I had ever explored. 1927-1944. Much had happened in between, but it was like an echo from the past to see Naples rising from the Bay and Vesuvius towering up away to starboard.

But apart from the terrific damage done to the dock area by the R.A.F. and some odd bomb damage in the town, it was much the same old Naples, smelly and sordid, a city of squalor. I soon found it be but little changed in most ways. The same old squalor and luxury, cheek by jowl, the same starvation amid beauty, the same old city of dirt and venereal disease, of chicanery, of rascals. To add to the former defects of Naples and the Neapolitan, a black market prevailed in a big way in

every kind of merchandise. As in the past the Neapolitan scoundrels, covering a high percentage of the population, were busy rooking the British and Americans, and, at the same time, holding their poorer fellow citizens to ransom for the barest necessities of life. The Allied authorities were battling hard against this vast black market, but it was an uphill struggle. An American Army policeman, who had been a cop back in the States and now had the job of enforcing law in southern Italy, told me: "I thought I knew most of the tricks these crooks could pull. I've had plenty to do with Italian racketeers back home. But now I find I'm only just beginning to learn. They're always thinking two or three rackets ahead of us. While we're busy putting down one racket, they're about two jumps ahead in starting new stunts. It makes me mad."

One of the simpler examples was over fish. The Allied authorities, seeing the populace so desperately short of food, permitted the Neapolitan fishing fleet to get to work again. It was ordained that the fishermen should turn their catches over to an official market where the fish could be sold at a reasonable and controlled price. Night after night the fishing fleet went out, but constantly returned with ridiculously small catches.

Investigation showed that the fishing boats were being intercepted at sea by motor launches run by the racketeers on stolen petrol. The bulk of the fish were then transferred to the launches and taken back to Naples to be sold on the black market at exorbitant prices.

Just as bad was the general mental attitude of most Neapolitans towards their "co-belligerents". I soon discovered that the bulk of Neapolitans refused to regard us in any sense as the victors or conquerors that we were. Ships of the British and American Navies lay in considerable force in the famous Bay of Naples, but this did not hammer the lesson home to them. The hordes of swarthy scoundrels who used to batten on the annual influx of visitors in the days of peace, were in their seventh heaven. The "mug tourists" had returned in different kinds of suits, but in much greater force.

I could just imagine them gloating: "Ah, but the Signor Thomas Cook, he never turn on so magnificent a mug tourist traffic. *Molto bene!*"

And how right they were. Naples fairly swarmed with troops—British, American and French, New Zealanders, Australians, South Africans and French colonial troops. A stroll down the main stem, the Via Roma, with its outwardly prosperous shops, was hard work. Dodging along in a stream of human ants, fighting men of many nations mingling with "Eyetic" civilians of various degrees of prosperity and cleanliness. Dodging the steady flow of military, naval and air force cars, jeeps and trucks. The whole city was like a giant anthill. Fortunes were being made in the very phoney-looking "invasion currency", which looked and felt like the cheapest variety of stage money.

While the higher class of local rogue cashed in on the simple invader in legal or semi-legal fashion, or ran a nice black market in collaboration with the fools and scoundrels to be found among all armies, the lesser rogues went in for straight theft. Nothing that was not chained down

was safe. Wheels from motor-cars were the favourite plunder, for tyres would bring fabulous sums on the black market. Leave a car standing unguarded after dark for half an hour, and you might well find that all four wheels had gone, with no hope of recovery.

In brief, Naples, long famous for her stinks, was stinking higher than ever, mentally, morally and physically.

A further trap for the lusty young fighting man was the great prevalence of venereal disease. Naples has long been notorious for this plague, and it seems that the locals regard it much as the British and Americans regard a bad cold in the head. So much so that medical men put up their plates advertising themselves purely and simply as pox doctors—Dr. Soandso, “Malatea Venere”. But the British and American authorities soon discovered that a form of venereal disease resistant to all normal treatments was rife in Naples. So the city was placarded with posters hammering home the lesson that love-making was very dangerous in this part of the world.

The sign which gave me a wry smile was on the great esplanade which runs along the smart section of the waterfront, and just outside the hotel which housed the Naval Mess in which I settled. There were actually two signs. The larger one on top read: “Speed not to exceed 15 m.p.h.”. The lower and smaller sign said in simple warning: “DANGER V.D.”. So that he who drove might read. A sort of welcome-to-Naples greeting.

I was never a great admirer of the Neapolitan as a specimen of humanity, but the conditions I now found prevailing in this city made me regard the average local citizen as a swarthy, slimy, vicious, lying scoundrel—an opinion which I found shared by many a Serviceman. No wonder that I did not indulge in any fraternization. In the little leisure time I had, I stuck close to the main Service resorts.

Chief of these was the Naval Officers’ Club, a smart place of chromium and glass run for the benefit of British and American officers by two local lads, and manned by waitresses in highly abbreviated skirts and black stockings. Here, at suitably fancy prices, you could drink Italian gin with the flavour of turpentine but warranted not to blind or kill, local cognac rendered tolerable by liberal additions of orange juice, or sickly, high-power tipples like Strega or cherry brandy which had never seen a cherry. Where the managers, the Boys from Syracuse, got their food I do not know, but you could have a reasonable luncheon including lobster or fish, a slice of thin, gristly meat called “steak” with a fried egg, and an omelette with a bottle of wine for about £1. This was a favourite haunt with my wards, the war correspondents. A supposed atmosphere of gaiety was provided by the ubiquitous Italian “orchestra”, a three-man affair of fiddler, pianist and bull-fiddle thumper, which mainly confined its efforts to that syrupy “Return to Sorrento” or “Lilli Marlene”, as popular with the Allies as with its German originators. Apparently the local musicians had not needed to change their repertoire much when we arrived, except perhaps to drop such items as “We March Against England”.

Next on the list came the British Officers' Club, a more staid and dignified Italian club in the same building as the San Carlo Opera House. Here again, at a rather lower price, you had the choice of the same local poisons, the local gin being rendered potable by liberal additions of fresh lemon squash. This club had a popular dining-room and dance floor. It had been one of the best clubs for Neapolitan gentlemen—if any. So its amenities were much better. This club adjoined the great Royal Palace of Naples, which subsequently housed the big Naafi club for other ranks.

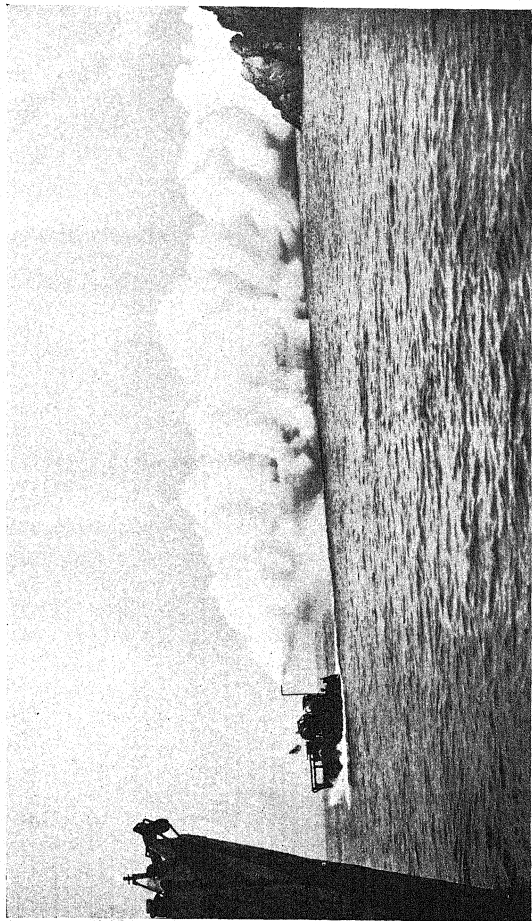
There was also "The Orange Grove", a club favoured most by the Americans because of their easier access to cars and jeeps. This was a largely open-air institution on a beautiful terrace high up the hillside and overlooking the Bay.

Last of the list of regular haunts, apart from a Montmartre-like dive for the French, was "The Casanova", a so-called night club along the main esplanade. The additional attraction here—for drunks or myopic customers—were a dozen dance hostesses who also provided cabaret turns of various styles of dancing, from the high kick to the belly roll. Later this haunt blossomed forth as the "Churchill Downs" Club. Not a dubious tribute to Britain's Battle Premier, but a nostalgic lure for the patrons of an American racetrack.

But there was one little place off the beaten track which I discovered with the landing-craft boys. Trust them. We inherited it direct from the German senior officers. This was a little bar or wine lodge called the Swiss House, run by a genial Swiss mine host. It was the nearest thing in Naples to an old-fashioned English inn. A narrow dark-panelled room opening off the street, with half a dozen tables, benches and chairs. Swiss decorations completed the ensemble. It was the boast of Hans, the Swiss proprietor, that he sold the best liquor in Naples. And I agree with him. A nice quiet little corner, reserved for officers, with the inevitable three-piece band but a bit quieter than the usual. Hans was a citizen of the world, whose life was a simple matter of producing and selling wine. With true Swiss common sense, he could see no point in all this nonsense of war and politics and ideologies. German or British—they were customers. They were wine-bibbers. And Hans Jeni, the servant of Bacchus, had cultivated his vineyards on the Island of Capri for human beings who knew how to sit around a good bottle of wine and talk the good talk. This genial, stocky, red-faced Hans Jeni of Switzerland had a happy knack of atmosphere. I have never met a man more versed in the magic art of dispensing with the custom of a troublesome, pugnacious or loud-mouthed intruder.

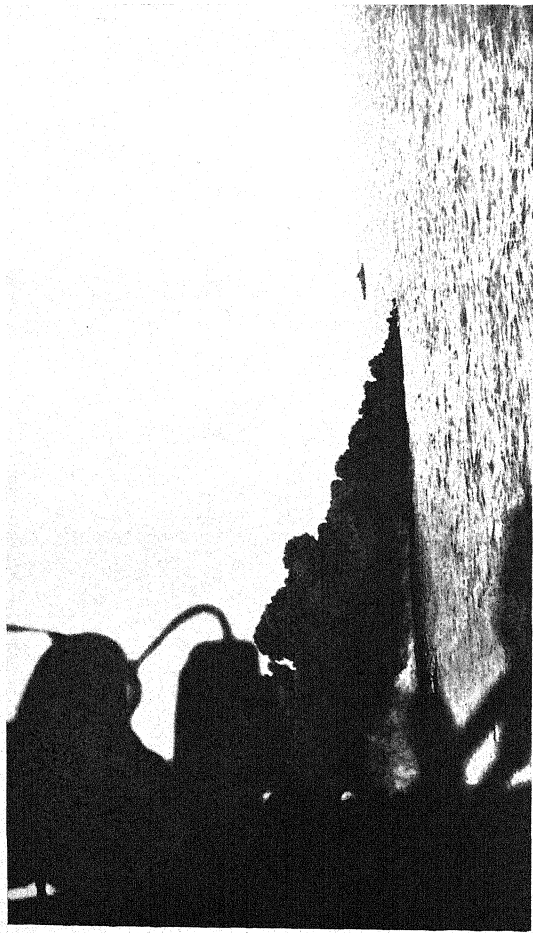
His wine, chilled to just the right degree, and his velvety vermouth were the right complement to an afternoon's idle conversation.

When you became a "regular", Hans came more out of his shell. It was my First Lieutenant, Rance Pochin-Johnson, who discovered the treasured trophy of the Swiss House. This was Hans Jeni's visitors' book, a stout volume in which were drawn or scribbled the contributions of earlier clients. I cannot call them customers.



BLINDING THE ENEMY: One of the smoke-making craft which gave P.J. his acid bath at Elba.





TRAGEDY: Small Landing Craft (Infantry) blows up from a direct hit after landing assault troops in the Normandy invasion.

The first section of this volume was the work of Italian officers. Then came the Nazi section. For the Swiss House had been a bar reserved to German senior officers until a few weeks previously. We spent an amusing hour or so browsing through the German contributions of sketches, verses and epigrams. We were astonished to find the similarity of outlook between us and the Germans on such subjects as beer and leave. There were some German contributions which showed us that the Nazis had not been able to entirely banish a sense of humour from the Teutonic mind. Drawings by an Afrika Corps officer of sitting under a desert palm tree and dreaming of steins of foaming lager, other sketches of leave trains, dreams of home and Teutonic pin-up girls.

And we, as the ultimate winners, completed the volume with our own bibulous comments.

That book would be a good subject of study for a student of comparative national psychology.

Yes, the Swiss House and a small company of landing-craft lads will be one of my few happy memories of seething, sordid, strident, scrofulous Naples.

To me Naples stank—in every possible way. But Naples was now the main centre of naval operations in the Mediterranean. Here too were assembled the war correspondents of the world. Cassino was yet to fall. Rome was still far away. This was my obvious base. I was reminded of this on the night of my arrival.

I had just got nicely to sleep on the top floor of the rickety, bomb-scarred hotel, overlooking the Bay of Naples, which housed one of the main naval messes. Suddenly I was wrenched awake by that universal moaning row, the siren. Almost immediately the anti-aircraft guns opened up with a shattering roar, above which I could hear the drone of diving enemy planes.

I roamed out on the little iron balcony. The Bay was gaily lit by German chandelier flares. Confound it. Those German pilots were off their track. The docks were a mile away. They were bombing the outer anchorage. Sheer inefficiency. The Luftwaffe must be slipping badly. Water spouted just a few hundred yards away as a bomb fell. Not so funny. I went inside. What to do? I had seen plenty of London blitzes, and taken the necessary precautions. I just did not want to look a mug by going downstairs in pyjamas and dressing-gown. What was the custom of the Mess on such occasions? I had not thought to inquire. But this building quaked most ominously. I was not going to be knocked out by a section of the cracked ceiling, so I crawled under the bed and tried to go to sleep again.

Just then came that familiar screech of another stick of bombs on the way down. This time it was a straddle. The hotel rocked to its foundations. "To hell with the custom of the Mess." I grabbed a greatcoat and slippers and moved downstairs—fast.

There I was delighted to find everyone else already assembled, on the ground floor. I was apparently the last out.

"Hell," I remarked to one group. "Does this happen every night?"

"Not at all," replied an elderly Commander. "You must have brought them with you. This is the best one we've had for a long time."

That sounded better.

"And what's the usual drill here? Do you usually come below?"

"By all means. This building is so well cracked that those top floors are sure to slide into the street if anything falls near."

Ah well—you live and learn.

A much better fireworks display was laid on for my benefit soon after arrival by old man Vesuvius. It was the best show put up by this illuminated mountain for about fifteen years. A full-scale eruption. Seen across the Bay from Naples itself, it was a glorious sight—great rivers of fierce red lava crawling down the sides of the giant cone. From time to time a mighty red gush of molten rock was vomited high into the air from the crater to replenish the streams which rolled down the mountainside. The main stream crawled steadily downwards, and from it branched glowing rivulets of the red tide. At one point there seemed to be an infernal waterfall of molten hell. All one Dantesque monochrome of fierce, hellish red. Clouds and smoke hanging low over the crater reflected the glow to heighten the whole effect. Up there on the slopes villagers were being evacuated from their homes, and as we watched there would come a few pinpoints of white at the head of the red tide as houses were engulfed.

Way out across the Bay of Naples there ran from the foot of Vesuvius a blood-red path of reflection upon the still, oily waters.

That was a terrific welcome back to Naples.

But right now I had little time for gooping. From the naval point of view the war was comparatively in the doldrums. Public interest was focused upon the great struggle for Cassino. Day after day the correspondents went racing up to the front to get their stories. But it was my job to see that the Navy also kept in the public eye. After all, we were playing a big part in the Battle of Italy. We were getting the supplies through to Anzio. Our cruisers, headed by the ever-hospitable *Orion*, were doing their regular bombardments along the coast in support of the troops in the coastal sector. And the minesweepers were toiling day and night to keep the supply channels clear. The Army was fighting terrifically, but the Navy was making this possible. It was not a bannerline story which the Navy had to tell for the time being, but it was a story.

In the Press headquarters at Naples I circulated daily, trying, and not entirely in vain, to revive the enthusiasm of the war correspondents for the work of the Navy in restoring the shattered port of Naples and keeping the supplies moving. But they had to have something stronger to justify cables to their papers. Another bombardment? Phooey, said the war correspondents—old stuff. Minesweeping? We know it all, they said. Times were tough for my line of business.

But when in a jam for anything, ask the lads of the landing craft. My old friends still had a story to tell. Anzio was still a name to conjure

with, even in the fickle newspaper headlines. And it was at Anzio that the landing-craft boys were still taking it on the chin, to judge by what I heard in the Mess. I must go there soon, myself, and see what was happening in that strange segment of the war. Meanwhile I must find some old friends from the little ships, and see what sort of a yarn they could spin for war correspondents.

I had just heard that "Pat" had arrived in Naples with his new command. His earlier craft, L.C.T.606, which had had the reputation in Algiers of being the most hospitable craft in the harbour, was out of commission. It had seen its best days after completing the Sicilian and Salerno operations. No longer would we kid "Pat" about the bawdy medical connotation of his little ship. L.C.T.606 was being converted into a dumb lighter to carry electric generating equipment up the Tiber for the essential supply of our naval establishments in Rome—when we got there.

So off to the rambling, bomb-scarred Italian naval dockyard in the shadow of the castle-fortress which dominates the Neapolitan waterfront with its great mediaeval bulk. In the dockyard the ugly ducklings of the Navy lay in serried ranks, awaiting their turn for the run to Anzio or the next big operation. And sure enough there was "Pat", the same old cheerful "Pat", with the merry grin. His only worry was the lack of trimmings to celebrate such a reunion. It was the wrong end of the month for the gin and whisky ration, and the wardroom was a far less palatial one than in the old 606—if an L.C.T. wardroom could ever be called "palatial".

In the 606 there was just enough room to swing a very small cat, or a kitten, a combined wardroom and cabin with settees down either side and space to stretch your legs. But in "Pat's" new command, an earlier "mark" or model of L.C.T., the wardroom was not much bigger than the kitchenette of a flat. In fact it was the wheelhouse of the craft. The centre of this cubby-hole was taken up by the pedestal of the wheel, the binnacle and voicepipes. Along one side bulkhead ran the First Lieutenant's bunk with a locker beneath where cigarettes and comforts were kept. In an opposite corner stood a small cupboard holding glasses and bottles. When in harbour, as now, the actual wheel was removed from the pedestal to make it possible to use the space as a wardroom—spare the word. At the moment this wardroom had rather an icebox atmosphere, for southern Italy was experiencing one of its longest and coldest winters for many years. As the Mediterranean sun got into its stride a few weeks later, however, this living space would become like an oven. That is just one of the minor discomforts with which the landing-craft boys put up.

Over a bottle of tolerable "vino", we sat in the dog-kennel wardroom and talked of all that happened since last we met in Sicily. I told him about North Russia. He talked about Salerno, the stickiest job which the tank landing craft had tackled. They took a hard pasting there keeping the supplies running in to the Army day after day in the struggle for the beach-head, which hung in the balance for quite a while.

"Never had so much damned ugly metal chucked at me before or since," said "Pat".

What about Anzio? "Pat" had just come back from a long spell up there.

"Not so funny," he said. "Starts to get you down a bit after a few weeks."

I had a pretty good idea of that. Read-Admiral Tony Morse, who, as Flag Officer Western Italy, was the Navy's local boss, had been visiting Anzio for a day. As a result of the conditions he found there he gave orders that the tank landing craft were to be relieved at much shorter intervals, and also the shore staff. Two or three weeks at a time was enough. From our Mess in Naples we had sent the Anzio boys a share of our liquor as a consolation prize.

So I asked "Pat" for more details of that hectic little segment of the war.

"A bit sticky," was his verdict. "The Hun gets plenty hostile at times. He's constantly cracking at the harbour area and the beaches with his eighty-eights. Those shells have got some sort of booster on them to give them a bit more range. And then Anzio Annie gets busy shelling the anchorage. She throws quite a big brick.

"We spend the day ferrying supplies from the Liberty ships out in the anchorage to the hards in the harbour. That's fairly simple, except when Anzio Annie is working hard. It's at night when you get caught in harbour that's a bit awkward."

"How do you mean, Pat?"

"Well, getting on towards dusk, they start to lay the night's smoke-screen. That's a real pea-souper and it blankets the whole harbour. If we've finished landing supplies, we're supposed to clear out to sea for the night. But often we get caught landing our last load, and then we've got to stay alongside for the night. Once they've laid that smoke-screen good and proper you just can't move."

"And it's worse at night?"

"It seems so. The Hun seems to hot it up at night, and you've got nothing to do but sit there and take it. Every few minutes you hear those bloody eighty-eights come cracking down all around the harbour. We take turns in throwing parties. Wonderful how many people you can crowd into one of these wardrooms. And we were lucky to have Tom Evans as a Commanding Officer in our lot. He plays the squeeze-box. We used to have singsongs at night. The heavier the Hun shells, the louder we sing. When you hear one go crash on the hard outside, you fill the glasses again, and sing a bit louder.

"But when you turn in, you can't help having that funny feeling in the pit of the stomach lying there in the dark and trying to forget how thin is the bulkhead. After all we're not armour-plated. However, you're so damned tired you do get to sleep.

"One of the craft had a scraggy cockerel as a mascot. That bird didn't seem to give a hoot for the shelling. You'd hear him crowing away there in the middle of the night. When the stuff was coming

thick and fast, you could see him standing on top of a pile of cargo and shrieking his defiance at the Hun.

"To add to the fun and games the Luftwaffe came over pretty regularly at night, dive-bombing."

"But what about our ack-ack?"

"It was a bit scrappy at first. But then they got the box barrage going, and that improved things a lot. The first day they got that going we had the best laugh of the lot at Anzio. We saw the Luftwaffe coming—about twenty-five of them. They were flying high and out to do a bit of that high-level hit or miss bombing.

"The ack-ack boys let 'em come until they were inside the box. About that time the Hun must have been puzzling a bit about why our fighters weren't tearing into them. And then they found the right answer. The box barrage let loose with one grand woomph. About a dozen of those German bombers just fell out of the sky. Some of them never knew what hit 'em. The survivors turned and did a bunk.

"We cheered like mad and then rolled around laughing. It was the most encouraging sight we'd seen for many a day. We'd been getting a bit tired of the Luftwaffe. Some of the lads were a bit bomb-happy by that time."

It was interesting stuff, but, as "Pat" and I both knew, it would come under the heading of "old stuff" for the war correspondents. "Pat" took another glass of "vino", and then he had the brainwave. It was only a bit of a story, but it was new. Down the other end of the docks there was an infantry landing craft with a new kind of job. The Commanding Officer was my old friend of Algiers' days with whom I had sailed from Algiers to Sousse on my way to Sicily.

So we went around the docks to visit him, and hear his story. And we were in luck. For he had some gin—a rarity at this time of the month. We could sit in comfort in his little wardroom and talk. For the L.C.I. (L) officer lives in luxury compared with his brother of the L.C.T. His wardroom is tiny enough. About six feet square, and including two bunks, a table, bookshelves, a cupboard and four chairs. High up in one corner, an electric fan puts up a hard fight against the oven atmosphere in warmer days. And off the wardroom opens the washplace complete with shower.

As all these craft were built in the United States, where they go in for comfortable trimmings; they are palaces compared with the L.C.T.s from the British shipyards. When our landing-craft types crossed to the United States to pick up their new commands, and sail them across the Atlantic, they were delighted with the happy innovations they found in their new craft. The Americans seemed to have considered everything—right down to a ship's typewriter, soap in the washbowls and toilet rolls, ready rigged. After showing the British visitors how lavish Yankee hospitality can be—and I know from personal experience how overwhelming it is—they topped it off by seeing that the L.C.I.s sailed with their lockers packed with the finest tinned delicacies and good liquor.

Some of our matelots, yearning for fish and chips with a lashing of vinegar, or plain roast beef, turned up their noses at tinned asparagus tips and similar delicacies. But the wardroom was happy at these variations in the monotone of naval catering.

This L.C.I. which "Pat" and I were now visiting had been one of those lucky ships. Now, after taking part in the Sicilian operation and earlier phases of the Italian campaign, it had a unique job. It was the Navy's Naafi ship for Anzio. A floating frontline shop. Each week she made the run to Anzio, where she spent the daylight hours touring the anchorage and distributing the liquor rations to the L.C.T.s and other small naval craft working up there. She also took the liquor ration for the base staff, and also all the little extras like chocolate, cigarettes and razor blades, normally bought at a Naafi shop.

With her beer for the ratings and spirits for the officers, she was a highly popular visitor to Anzio. After seeing the conditions at Anzio, Tony Morse had given a simple, crisp order about the liquor ration for the lads there. "Spoil them," was his word.

Admiral Morse was regarded by all officers and men in his command as a friend. He might be as big a nuisance as any Flag Officer, but he was a live wire with a keen eye to the welfare and comfort of everyone in his Command; he was always on the move to see what was doing, and he got things done. The lads of the landing craft knew him, liked him, and respected him.

The Naafi L.C.I. was his idea, or at least sponsored by him. And at the same time he was having built at a small shipyard around the Bay a special little ship to take over these Naafi duties.

Well, here was a bit of chicken-feed news to offer the war correspondents. One of them even asked to make a trip to Anzio in her, and with him I sent a news-reel cameraman, and from my own little staff of official naval photographers and reporters, one of each. At the same time, I decided, from what "Pat" had told me, that I really must visit Anzio myself, soon.

But first I would go round to the L.C.I. base at Potsuoli to have a talk to "Tackline". Potsuoli itself was well worth the visit. The little town is a prize example of the smelly, scrofulous but picturesque Neapolitan fishing centre. Narrow, cobbled streets, old buildings and open-air market stalls with fine displays of fruit, vegetables and flowers.

After edging the jeep through crowds of scruffy, black-clad citizens who seemed intent on committing suicide beneath our miniature juggernaut, we found the L.C.I. harbour hard by the little stone customs-house. There we saw a few British L.C.I.s but even more American craft, distinguishable by their much taller bridge structure. The American craft were doing the main work now of ferrying troops and special supplies to and from Anzio.

I broached my plan of visiting Anzio to "Tackline".

"What the hell for?" he asked. "Much too dangerous up there." That sounded funny from a lad like "Tackline", whose past four or

five years had been spent in operations which would have given the directors of his insurance company heart failure.

"Well, there's a B.B.C. radio unit up there," I explained. "And I've got a good idea for an 'Into Battle' feature. I want to get some radio recordings of background noises made on the spot."

"All right, I'll fix it," said "Tackline". "When do you want to go?"

"Not till next week. I've got a few things to clew up."

"All right. I'll fix it with the Yanks. They're doing the job at present. Most of our craft are round on the Adriatic side running stuff over to Viz for the Yugoslavs."

"That's another idea. I must try that too."

"When you get round to that, you'll have to dodge the Army's Gestapo," he warned.

"What the deuce is that?"

"Yugoslavia is sealed off by the Army, and nobody can go there without permission, which is damned hard to get. The other day the Gestapo had the cheek to try and stop me. I went over there to see some of my flotilla, and decided I'd cross over with them. The Gestapo stepped in and said I couldn't go over. But I made them change their tune. 'All right,' I told them, 'if I don't go tonight that flotilla doesn't sail, and you can swim to Viz with your supplies.' That settled it.

"If you take it quietly, I can fix it up for you when you want to go. But watch the Gestapo."

To my lasting regret I never was able to make that crossing. I had to send one of my officers, Lieutenant Harold Laycock, over to look for some good feature copy, and he had the time of his life there. He dodged the Gestapo and went hunting in the Dalmatian islands with the motor gunboats which used to beat up the enemy's coastal traffic in those waters night after night. He spent quite a time at Viz, and got to know the Yugoslavs pretty well. But the incident he will best remember of fraternizing with Tito's people ended in an unexpected swim.

One of our landing craft was disembarking a band of husky Yugoslav women partisans. As one hefty dame, cluttered up with guns, grenades and equipment, came down the gangway to step ashore, Harold, always the little *squire des dames*, tried to give her a helping hand.

"Not that she was any beauty," he told me, "but I was just trying to be helpful and all gallant Ally.

"To my complete surprise, she hauled off and gave me such a back-handed swipe that I went flying into the water. They're tough those Yugoslav women. I went to one dance the Tito lads gave ashore, and when I was frisking around with various partners I couldn't make out what on earth were the hard lumps under their skirts against which I kept bumping.

"Later I found out that they still carry hand-grenades slung from belts beneath their skirts even at a friendly dance."

Well, perhaps I did not miss so much by not going to Viz. They



might not have liked my face. Anzio was a different kettle of fish—no damned Amazons with hand-grenades and back-handed swipes to add to the hazards of war.

## CHAPTER IV

### "ANZIO ANNIE"

"WELL, so long, P.J. I'm off to Anzio for a day or two. Look after the correspondents."

I tried to make it sound casual—like slipping out to buy a book of stamps.

"Rather you than me," said my First Lieutenant cynically.

We had both formed a rather dim view of Anzio from the stories the landing-craft boys told. Secretly P.J. was envious. We were both curious about the famous beach-head, and I was going to satisfy my curiosity. I knew that in his heart P.J. would have liked to be coming along. He was no chair-borne warrior. His career for the first three or four years of the war had been plenty hectic, from stoker in a mine-sweeping trawler to First Lieutenant of a fleet minesweeper. He had been twice wounded, and survived the toughest of all North Russian convoys, P.Q.17, when a high proportion of the whole convoy was wiped out by the German fleet. He had also spent some months mine-sweeping out of North Russian ports, and, being a fencing blue, had led a small British naval party which joined the Russians in a commando raid behind the German lines in the far north. On that occasion he had the unique experience of doing battle with the enemy with a good old-fashioned naval cutlass, cutting his man down in Nelsonian fashion.

Lanky, long-faced P.J. was as good a friend and second-in-command as any man could wish for—honest and loyal, with a grand sense of humour.

It was late in the afternoon when we climbed into the jeep and went bowling around to Potsuoli. "Tackline" was waiting.

"All set," he said. "And I've got something for you."

He led the way on board a British L.C.I. and introduced me to one of her officers, a fellow Australian. Then he produced a gin bottle filled with rum.

"This is the stuff you need when you go to Anzio," he said, and pushed the bottle inside the blouse of my battledress. For battledress was *de rigueur* at the beach-head at this time of the year. I was grateful, but knowing how strictly sacrosanct rum is in the Navy, I could not help asking how he worked the oracle.

"That's all right, Digger," he assured me. "A couple of my senior

hands would rather have whisky than rum. So I worked a trade for you. Nelson's blood is more fortifying in a place like Anzio.”

There it went again. Still harping on Anzio. It was just another proof of the enterprise of landing-craft lads, but, in their kind of job, you could hardly expect them to be orthodox and K.R. and A.I. I tell the story now only because I feel sure that by the time this book gets into print “Tackline” should be on his way back to “civvy street”. Anyway the powers-that-be have got to prove it. Just another illustration of the generosity which was “Tackline’s” great characteristic.

Armed with the precious bottle, we crossed to the American L.C.I. at the next berth, where I was introduced to the Commanding Officer as his extra passenger for the trip. Already the troops and supplies which this craft was taking to Anzio were on board, and we left a few minutes later. It was dark by the time we shaped course northwards up the coast of Italy.

I sat in the darkened little wardroom of the L.C.I. talking with the American officers. This wardroom, precisely the same as the British L.C.I., was more crowded, for it was the home of four American officers. That is the great difference between the British and American Navies. In practically every class of ship they have much larger crews. The British Navy trains all men to do several jobs. For instance there is no special diving rating in the Royal Navy. The men who qualify for this skilled work of divers may be seamen, stokers, butchers or bakers, who become divers only when there is need. But the United States Navy has a greater belief in “one man, one job”, especially in times of war when high-speed training of raw recruits is the necessity.

That is why the L.C.I. taking me to Anzio was more crowded than a British counterpart would have been.

Together with a couple of the American officers, and a British Army officer who was returning to his unit at the beach-head, I sat in the little wardroom until eleven o'clock. We yarned and drank relays of coffee in good American style. As American naval ships are “dry”, thanks to the decree of a dead and unlamented U.S. Secretary of the Navy (“Goddam Josephus Daniels”), my bottle of rum was very welcome as a lacing for the coffee.

At last, at eleven o'clock, down the narrow companionway to “Number Three Troop Space”, with its dim lights and tiers of canvas bunks just below the waterline. And, setting myself to wake at dawn, I was soon sleeping the sleep of the just, with a lifebelt as pillow—just in case of E-boat attack.

The first light was just growing as I climbed up to the bridge in the morning. It was refreshingly chilly up there. The young American Commanding Officer passed me a cup of coffee—it seems to be almost on tap in all American ships.

“Had a good night's sleep?”

“Yes, thank you. Where are we now?”

“Getting fairly close. Turning into the swept channel soon.”

There was nothing much to see except an oily, glassy sea. Ahead

of us steamed three other American L.C.I. and astern of us were two more.

"Where's Anzio?"

The young American pointed away to starboard. All I could see was a bank of morning mist reinforced by smoke.

Then up the voicepipe from the wireless cabin came the report, "Red warning." On went the tin hats. The look-outs and the Oerlikon gunners with itchy fingers gazed skywards. In the distance there was a drone of air engines. We craned skywards. Not a speck in the light blue sky. We cruised on silently.

Ahead the other landing craft altered course to starboard. We were approaching the swept channel leading into Anzio, the mine-clear passage to the beach-head. We altered course in their wake.

Again the voicepipe spoke. "Gone to yellow." Relax a bit. Now the morning mists were thinning and the Mediterranean sun was breaking through. The minutes passed.

Then ahead I saw it. Anzio. A bright little town like a toy town bathed in the sunlight way ahead there.

Once more the voicepipe spoke. "Red warning, again." Now the drone of aircraft was nearer. Again we gazed skywards. This was obviously the Land of Red Warnings. But all we could see were our own reassuring fighters chasing around the skies, part of the constant air patrol from the Nettuno airfield over the beach-head.

Closer we crept. Now we could see the sweep of beach which fronted the twin seaside resorts of Anzio and Nettuno. Where one began and the other ended I never discovered. Away to starboard clouds of dust marked the airfield from which the fighters operated. Closer we crawled, and at last I could see the effects of bombing and shelling. Anzio and Nettuno were mere shells of their former selves.

Suddenly a bright light blinked from the port war signal station, giving us our berthing orders. The craft ahead put on speed, and our motors quickened.

Now the stone breakwater began to emerge from the mixture of mist and smoke. That was where we were heading. And about a mile out lay the merchantmen, the Liberty ships, discharging their cargoes of ammunition and supplies into tank landing craft and those useful little amphibious motor lorries, the DUKWS, or, more naturally, "ducks".

A few miles away on the starboard beam some indistinguishable craft was buzzing along like a strange water-beetle, leaving a thick wall of smoke behind it. This particular smokescreen, I found, was to screen the anchorage from the Germans' best situated observation post. The post was on top of a mountain, and known as Circe's Seat.

It was there, according to the legend, that Circe, the Beautiful Red-head Pin-Up Girl of the Classics, sat to lure such seamen as Ulysses and by her magic convert them into swine. A very pretty legend. But now it had come true. The swine had broken loose and were in occupation of Circe's Seat.

Smoke, smoke and still smoke. That was my first impression of Anzio—and my last.

Past the outer anchorage of destroyers and minesweepers we glided, close to the inner line of Liberty ships. Coal-black Americans driving the living necklace of “ducks” which linked the merchantmen with the beach in an endless chain of supply, waved to us, flashing a white grin in a black face. Now we were rounding the gapped stone breakwater beside which lay bomb-shattered and rusting hulks.

Half ahead both, slow ahead both. Stop both. Slow ahead both. The lines were thrown. Half astern both. Stop both. We were at Anzio. With toothbrush, shaving gear and other odds and ends of gear disposed about battledress, and the now half-empty rum bottle stowed inside the blouse, I stepped ashore in the glorious sunshine of a Mediterranean Spring morning.

All was quiet still. It seemed peaceful enough, this terrible Anzio. My ears strained and swivelled like a Radar aerial, reaching for the first note of an approaching shell. Still nothing. I asked my way to Navy House.

“Up that road there, keep bearing left until you come to the only undamaged building in Anzio. That’s Navy House,” said an Army officer.

Half-way along a roughly metalled road, an American Army lorry driven by a Negro came roaring past me in a cloud of dust. The instant after it had passed me, I felt a sharp, stinging blow between the shoulder-blades. With nerves taut, I jumped about a foot in the air.

“Dammit. Five minutes at Anzio, and I’ve bought it.”

My immediate thought was that the roar of the American lorry had drowned the arrival of one of those anti-personnel fragmentation shells from the German eighty-eights of which I had been warned. For an instant I thought I had been wounded. Then the truth dawned on me. The lorry, speeding over the rough metal of the road, had thrown up a piece of the metal and hit me between the shoulders. I sighed with relief, grinned sheepishly and trudged on. And there ahead lay Navy House, a three-storied building wearing the White Ensign. Sure enough, apart from missing windows, it was the only undamaged building I had seen so far in Anzio. I am not sure how it finished up, but I believe that Navy House remained the only undamaged building in Anzio right to the end. Mighty close to war again, as the Americans phrase it. Upstairs to the Operations Room to make my number.

“Hullo, sir. Where are you from?” said the young Officer of the Watch. I told him.

“What can we do for you?” I explained my mission. Then N.O.I.C. (Naval Officer in Charge), a tough, elderly commander, came in.

“Up from Naples, eh?”—“Yes, sir.”—“When do you intend to go back?”—“In a day or two, sir.”—“Hmmp. You’re a bit different from most of our visitors. They nearly all go back the same day.”

There it was again. The same old hint of unhealthy Anzio. Yet it seemed a nice peaceful Spring morning. I had been here half an hour, and had not heard a shot fired.

Accommodation? Yes, they could fix me up with a cabin on the top floor, next to the Doc and the Padre. Top floor, eh? Didn't sound healthy. But if the Doc and Padre could take it I guess I could. Anyway, wasn't it the only undamaged building in Anzio, and there was no reason why it should not remain so. It had no specially sheltered position, but it seemed to have the luck.

Over a welcome breakfast I asked lots of questions about this isolated little fragment of the war. Yes, it was particularly quiet that morning. Just then an eighty-eight shell cracked half a mile away in the direction of the harbour. An air burst. Anti-personnel brick. What was the main direction of the enemy shelling? They came over that bit of a rise just across the road. How far was the front line? Oh, a couple of miles away. Yes, it was a bit trying when the Hun got really hostile with shelling and night-bombing. Yet somehow, you got used to Anzio and even started to like it. Next day I cottoned on to what they meant.

"You should have been here last night," grinned one lieutenant. "More flap than that."

"What about?" I asked.

"Oh some half-witted communications rating messed up a signal which was passed by 'phone. The Radar station picked up the usual bunch of E-boats or enemy small craft heading into the Tiber River, a few miles north of here. They telephoned the usual signal: 'Eight enemy craft entering Tiber.'

"But the goon at this end misheard it. He wrote down the signal, 'Eight enemy craft entering HARBOUR.' Then the band played and the balloon went up. Somebody had a brainwave. Here came the counter-invasion. The Hun was going to make a landing behind our lines.

"Phew. What a flap that started. We were rushing around strapping on revolvers, grabbing rifles and bayonets and getting ready for trouble.

"Then someone else thought of checking back with the Radar station and clarifying the signal. That finished it. 'Eight enemy craft entering TIBER.' The flap was over. Just a GONFU. We went back to sleep."

After breakfast they fixed me up with a jeep and driver, and off I went to the busy little harbour. Still no serious shelling. I had picked a nice quiet day for my Anzio initiation.

Never before had this vest-pocket port of one of Rome's most fashionable watering places seen such activity. In one corner a couple of American landing ships were discharging their cargo of tanks, trucks and jeeps. Round by the breakwater lay the six L.C.I.s with which I had arrived. They were getting their return journey passengers. Their drill was to discharge, pick up and get to hell out of the harbour before things got sticky.

Next to the tank landing ships lay my friends, a couple of tank landing craft. The cargo of shells they had picked up from a Liberty ship that morning were being unloaded by a gang of cheerful American Negro soldiers.

Two hundred yards farther on, where the beach began, the “ducks” were emerging from the water, rolling across the beach, up on the road and away in a cloud of white dust. Other ducks were bumping their way back empty to the beach and the sea, and off out to the waiting merchantmen. Throughout the daylight hours they formed an ever-moving, never-ending chain of supply, a living necklace on the blue sea. Many of these were operated by a crew of two American Negroes.

These black citizens of the United States won themselves a fine reputation at Anzio. “Steady as a rock under fire,” one British naval officer told me. I spoke to one of the coal-black soldiers myself about his job, for, in effect, he was a landing-craft type too. A “duck” is a landing craft. I questioned him about hotter days at Anzio.

“Yassuh,” he agreed in a beautiful broad southern Negro voice. “It shoh can get hotted up. An’ was I skeered. Yassuh.”

He rolled his eyes, and flashed a real toothpaste advertisement smile. A cheerful comedian that boy.

I found my landing-craft friends taking it easy while the Americans unloaded their craft. With the day growing hotter, the welcoming glass of beer tasted good. I explained what I wanted. A radio recording of a tank landing craft at Anzio leaving the “hard” after discharging her cargo. The Hun might supply noises off by lobbing a couple of bricks in the harbour area while we were doing it, but not too close. The lads were amused. They would be glad to play. Would I come along between four and five that afternoon with the recording gear. So that was arranged.

Next thing was to find the Army’s Public Relations unit. Over the telephone I located them at Nettuno. So off in the jeep again along the Nettuno road, with its ruins on either hand. With swivelling ears, I was still waiting for the Hun to turn hostile. The Army Press headquarters were established in a couple of badly damaged houses overlooking the bay. At the road entrance was one large crater which marked the spot where a war correspondent had been wiped out by a shell a few days earlier.

From the road you stepped into the top storey of these buildings, and then down a couple of flights of stairs to the living quarters of the war correspondents, dusty rooms with broken ceilings. Rows of stretcher beds and mosquito nets. A few wash-basins. That was all. The Mess room was a dark little cubby-hole with some of the original furniture of the house, lit by candles in bottles for most of the day. They lived a rather Spartan life in Anzio. These living-rooms opened on to balconies which hung over the bit of shingly beach and looked out over the bay.

You had a beautiful feeling of security down here. The whole building faced away from the direction of the enemy shelling, and backed on to twenty or thirty feet of road bed. Nothing but a freak shot could penetrate here. Most of the war correspondents were out and about the beach-head seeking stories, but they were expected back for lunch soon.

The B.B.C. boys, Vaughn Thomas and his engineer, Bob Wade,

should be back any time. Henry Buckley, now working for Reuters, I believe, strolled in and gave me a welcome to Anzio in his own quiet way. Others of the gang came in one or two at a time. They were a good bunch of war correspondents in the beach-head, doing a real war reporting job under dangerous and uncomfortable conditions. Out and about all the time, up the front line and sharing the hazards and discomforts of the fighting man to the full.

Apologies were offered for the absence of whisky or gin. I had arrived at the fag end of the week, and the liquor ration was not due for a couple of days. One of the last remaining bottles of beer was poured for me, a very generous gesture in these parts, and some watery "vino" went pleasantly with the lunch. Lunch was based on the inevitable bully beef suitably treated on a primus stove by a soldier cook, and garnished with a few tomatoes.

Big Bob Wade came in and was introduced. I told him what I wanted, and he was keen to play. But we should wait a while for Vaughn Thomas to get in, just to make sure he did not need the jeep with the recording gear for some front-line job that afternoon.

And then Vaughn Thomas. I will always be glad to have had the pleasure of teaming along with Vaughn. What a front-line reporter he was. I believe that he saw as much of this war at close quarters as any man in or out of uniform. He seemed to thrive on danger, yet, as I discovered during the invasion of southern France, he was not foolhardy. One of his most famous broadcasts was his brilliant running commentary from a bomber in a big air raid on Berlin.

Vaughn was a small, neat, well-spoken Welshman, always alert, smiling and bubbling over with fun. I took to him at first greeting. We soon fixed it up for me to use his recording gear that afternoon. Then we settled down to lunch. Over the table he told me something of the life at Anzio.

It was typical of Vaughn that all his stories should have a good laugh attached to them. Best of all was the story of the hard-boiled old sergeant he had met up near the front line only that morning.

The Hun was very busy at Anzio on the psychological side of warfare as well as the plain business of killing. Nearly every day he was firing over both the British and American lines dummy mortar shells filled with propaganda leaflets. For the British sector his ace leaflet carried a picture of a good-looking girl sitting on the edge of a bed. She was naked. And standing in front of a mirror near the bed was an American soldier, doing his tie and glancing at the woman with a very self-satisfied expression.

Beneath this picture ran the caption: "While you are away—the Yanks are lease-lending your women." On the other side of the leaflet this theme was developed more fully, with appeals to the British Tommy to stop fighting and end the war.

"Can you get me a copy?" I asked Vaughn.

"They're hard to come by," he explained, "the boys are using them as pin-up girls."

"How do the lads take it?"

"Most of them laugh at them. A bunch of the leaflets came over while I was up the line this morning. There was a scramble for them as they floated down. One horny handed old sergeant picked up a copy and began to laugh at it. I asked him what was the joke, and he just held the leaflet out to me, pointed at the glamorous girl on it and remarked with a grin, 'Not much like my old woman, anyway, sir'."

The similar leaflets which the enemy scattered over the American sector of the front had Jews and "plutocrats" back home as the villains of the piece.

Vaughn also told another joke about the leaflets in the British sector. A distinguished American military visitor was up the line to see a British unit. The British colonel, to show the good morale of his outfit, spoke to one intelligent-looking private.

"Well, Brown," he asked, "what do you think of these filthy German propaganda leaflets about the womenfolk?"

Private Brown stood rigidly at attention, and replied: "Hmff. We didn't need the Germans to tell us that, sir." The American visitor quickly smothered a smile. Exit visitor and Colonel in a hurry.

As to the Negro troops, Vaughn had a good story about them too. He had been driving back from the front towards dusk a few days ago. In such a small, isolated bit of war as the Anzio beach-head we had to be always on the alert for infiltration by the enemy. Around dusk sentries start to get itchy trigger fingers, and it is important to be able to give the right answer to the challenge immediately.

Vaughn was driving back to his billet, tired and dusty after a day's work. Suddenly a big Negro sentry appeared from the shadows, and shouted, "Whoa boss!" Vaughn pulled up and gave the password. Then he asked, just a little bit irritably:

"Is that the way you always do your job as a sentry?"

"Sure, boss," came the reply.

"Don't you know how to challenge properly? Weren't you going to challenge me?"

The Negro flashed one of those big grins and drawled:

"No, boss. Ah wasn't goin' to challenge. Ah wus gwine to shoot."

Vaughn drove on.

That was the funny side of Anzio. As a residential area it was far from funny. It was a real test for a fighting man. In or out of the line, everyone at Anzio was constantly under fire. The troops did their spell of duty in the front line, a nerve-racking job since they knew very well that, with such a mere foothold on enemy territory and the sea at their backs, they could not afford to budge whatever the enemy threw in. Patrolling, skirmishing, fighting. There was no rest in the front line. Day and night the enemy mortars kept plugging away, and mortars are the weapon which the soldier dislikes as much as any. After this front-line spell, the troops came out to "rest". But rest in its proper sense was a word unknown at Anzio. No comfort, no entertainment. And always the enemy shells scattered at random all over the beach-head.



In hospital, in billet, everywhere, you were likely at any minute of the day or night to hear that close whistle and crack of an eighty-eight shell. Only well underground could you really relax. What you really needed was a new invention: a portable slit trench. Yet somehow the majority of men got used to this weird troglodyte existence.

After lunch it was snoozing time for all who did not have an immediate job. I dragged a chair out into the sunshine on the balcony, and settled down. It was an interesting sight. Away to the left there were constantly renewed clouds of dust as our fighter aircraft landed or took off to maintain constant patrols over the area. High in the sky the fighters roared and raced. Farther on, the smoke-making ship was still weaving backwards and forwards like a shuttle, maintaining that smoke-screen which hid the anchorage from the German observers up there on Circe's Seat.

To the right lay Anzio harbour, and off there the lines of merchantmen linked to the beach by the chain of "ducks".

At that moment it all seemed so peaceful, bathed in lovely sunshine. Yet all the time, until you ceased to hear it, came the rumble of gunfire. And around the aerodrome, a couple of miles' distant, you could see the spurts of earth and dust where enemy shells were landing at intervals.

At my feet a working party of American Negroes were busy cleaning the beach. They gathered the piles of drift wood, wreckage, flotsam and jetsam and seaweed into piles and set fire to them. More smoke. Always smoke. Even throughout the day a pall of smoke hung over Anzio, and at night it was intensified.

I drifted off to sleep in the sun.

An hour later I was awakened by a voice—a familiar voice. Now where had I heard that before? Of course: radio "discoveries" Carol Levis had arrived. In khaki he looked more corpulent than ever. He was proud of the fact that he was the first Ensa artist to come to Anzio. He was making a tour of all units, and thoroughly enjoying himself.

"Have a cup of . . ." began the Army's senior Press Relations Officer.

"Don't say it, old boy," Carol interrupted with a chuckle. "That seems to be the big greeting in these parts."

The previous day he had visited about a dozen units.

"Everywhere I went," said Carol, "it was the same thing everywhere. As soon as I arrived, somebody would bob up and say, 'You're just in time. We've brewed up. Have a nice cup of tea.' Not wanting to be rude, I drank tea until I felt like a human samovar."

We laughed at this. Carol's figure rather bore out the idea.

"I got back to my billet with my tonsils awash," he went on. "And I'll give you one guess what greeting I got there. Yes, you're right. The Major looked up at me, and said, 'You look tired. Now I've just got the right thing for you, something you'll enjoy.' Before I could stop him, he had said it: 'A nice cup of tea.'"

That was another aspect of Anzio. "A nice cup of tea."

Soon it was time for Bob Wade and myself to climb into the radio-recording jeep and go jogging off to the harbour. We went on board the landing craft I had selected that morning. It was discharging a new cargo from the merchant ships.

The Commanding Officer and his First Lieutenant, with the two officers from an adjacent L.C.T., were waiting for us, in typical landing-craft style. Our greeting was, "What will you have?"

"What have you got?"

"Gin, whisky, beer or—rum."

When we chose rum, good old Navy rum, expecting a tot, we were staggered to be handed two whisky glasses filled with "Nelson's blood".

I could not help asking the secret of such a lavish supply of rum. Then I learned a further secret of Anzio.

"It's amazing how accurate the German gunfire is," said one of the young officers, with a grin. "We simply can't figure it out. Every time a shell lands in the harbour area, a splinter from it seems to penetrate our spirit locker. And as sure as you take a jar of rum out of the locker, along comes a shell and blows it to bits, leaving you with the handle of the jar in your hand. Then you've got to fill in a report giving the facts. Isn't it strange?"

We agreed that it was most peculiar, and watched our hosts pour out two more whisky glasses full of this potent tippie, which is far stronger than anything you can get ashore these days. I was starting to take a much rosier view of Anzio. My ears were stopping twitching. But after that second glass, I decided it was time to do the recording. Bob went back to the jeep and brought the microphone with a long lead on board. Then he went to start the turntable with the recording discs, and we got on with the job.

The ratings stood around grinning while their Commanding Officer and I climbed up on the bridge, and he went through the orders as though he were taking his craft out to the anchorage. Then I went down to the wheelhouse and recorded the coxswain doing his job at the wheel, and finally down to the engine-room to get the sound of the great diesel engines roaring and the faint tinkle of the engine-room telegraph. I was even a little disappointed that the Hun did not provide the noises off with a few bricks—not too near.

With these sound effects for my projected "Into Battle" script in the bag, Bob and I settled down in the wardroom to yarn. The L.C.T. lads said that they reckoned they would not be able to get clear of the harbour that night. At the rate their new cargo was being discharged, they would still be there when the smokescreen came down.

It was over several more noggins of rum that I discovered yet another secret of Anzio—the camaraderie.

Back in Naples there was always some bickering as between Service and Service, and between the British and the Americans. But up here, among the real front-line men, it was all one grand team. The young British naval officers were loud in their praise of both the British and American Army Service Corps officers with whom they came in contact.

The Army, British and American alike, was always welcome on board the landing craft.

They also thought highly of the American Negroes for their cheerfulness, cleanliness and courage. Shelling or no shelling by "Anzio Annie", the German big gun which was situated well back towards Rome, those American Negroes and their white comrades kept the unending chain of "ducks" running to and from the anchorage.

"Only this morning," said one of our young hosts, "an American officer told me a story which typifies the happy-go-lucky attitude of those black boys. Two of the Negroes in a 'duck' went chugging out to the anchorage for their first load of the day.

"As they approached the first Liberty ship they gave a hail. The First Officer of the merchantman, a man of dignity, looked over, and one of the Negroes shouted: 'Say, cap'n. What have you got? Ammo or rayshuns (rations).'

"The white officer, very much on his dignity, answered: 'All right, coloured boy, come alongside. We have a full cargo of ammunition.'

"With a broad grin, and a farewell wave, the Negro said: 'Oh ammo. Phooey!' And off he went chugging in his sea-going motor-car to find a ship with a more interesting cargo."

There had been some slight rift in the Anglo-American lute earlier in the campaign when the Americans, in a way not yet discovered, had managed to get away with a supply of the British Navy's gin. That was before the Naafi L.C.I. was running. The Navy's gin had been landed on the beach. Then it had just disappeared into thin air. But by now all hard feeling over this very serious incident had disappeared.

So we sat and yarned over the drinks until I was feeling fine. My ears were stopping twitching. I was becoming less sound conscious. I never entirely lost that twitchy-ear feeling throughout my brief stay in Anzio. Knowing the nature of the place makes you very sound conscious.

The L.C.T. boys said that, before I returned to Naples, I should try and get a view of Anzio from the sea at night. It was a remarkable effect of smoke, darkness and pinpoints of light. Apart from the flashes of the guns seen dimly through the smoke, there were generally a number of small fires at dumps of ammunition or supplies. There were hundreds of these small dumps scattered throughout the beach-head, well dispersed in small quantities for safety. But enemy fire was constantly setting these alight. The Army had developed a new technique of dealing with such fires. Tanks with a kind of bulldozer scoop attachment on the front would come along and scatter and smother the burning material.

While we were talking, two of the Army officers from Press headquarters arrived to join us. The party was getting into its stride, and rum is a wonderful comforter.

A little later I suggested adjourning the party to Navy House, which was my Mess for the time being. They had told me that there was plenty to drink there, thanks to the dictum of "Tony" Morse.

Bob Wade had to return to Vaughn Thomas. They were going to do a job up the line that night. But the Commanding Officer of the landing craft and the two Army officers accepted the invitation.

Up in the Navy House Mess we got to talking about the Anzio campaign. By this time I was just about ready to conquer Rome single-handed. Wonderfully encouraging stuff this Navy rum. Especially with a few whiskies to top it off. The two Army types suggested that we jump in their jeep and go visiting up the line. Off we set, but had not gone far when we ran into a thick smokescreen on a strange road, and, perhaps fortunately, we had to call it a day.

So back to Navy House for a nightcap. By that time I was quite ready to sleep on the top floor. I had met my prospective neighbours, the Doc and the Padre, and they seemed to regard it as quite a comfortable billet. The Doc in particular was a cheery type who had spent many weeks at Anzio, and seemed to prefer it to more civilized parts. I had met just such another type earlier in the day, a Scots lieutenant who revelled in the title of Assistant King's Harbour Master, a sort of glorified berthing officer. I was even beginning to appreciate their point of view. The lack of formality and the camaraderie in these parts was a great compensation for the discomfort and the dangers.

Nevertheless, I never spent the night on the top floor of Navy House. I accepted the invitation of the Army to sleep at the Press Mess. After all, it was the natural focus of my activities—and it was well protected from shelling.

And so to bed.

It was getting on towards dawn when I awoke. “Anzio Annie” appeared to be busy. At fairly frequent intervals there was the crash of shells falling somewhere in the vicinity, a bit away towards the harbour area. For a while I lay awake and listened, thinking happily of the two storeys of road bed which lay like a cliff behind the room in which I was sleeping.

The Hun was a bit hostile, but I was not on the top floor of Navy House.

The morning broke sunny and peaceful again. From the balcony I could see no sign of the night's shelling in the anchorage or the distant harbour. The merchantmen and Navy ships out in the bay were all present and correct. Once a town has been thoroughly wrecked in the early phases of action, it is remarkable how much metal you must throw to do any real damage or inflict heavy casualties.

Well, now I had my recordings and had seen the Navy at Anzio, there was nothing more for me to do. I must see about returning. So off to Navy House to make arrangements and pay my Mess bill.

Yes, there were some L.C.I.s leaving on the return voyage to Naples just before noon. That would suit me.

But then I heard the latest news. Some German one man torpedoes had tried to reach the anchorage last night and failed. One of them, complete with its crew of one, had come ashore on the beach up near the front line. My new friend, the Assistant King's Harbour Master, was

going up to render it safe for handling. I decided to join him. There were a small knot of Americans around the torpedo when we reached the beach. Although the beach was under the observation of the enemy, he did not seem to be doing anything about it. One of the Americans who had seen the torpedo come ashore told me about it.

"We saw this new kind of porpoise heading for the beach, and couldn't make out what it was," he said.

"Then this Kraut, the driver or rider or whatever you like to call him, opens up this sort of perspex dome, and waves to us. As he touched down, we ran to the beach and dragged him out.

"One of our chaps who can speak the Kraut lingo starts to gabble at him. It seems he and his buddies had been launched too soon—made a miscalculation. So they never reached the anchorage. He had had to come ashore because he'd run out of oxygen. I reckon he calculated he was landing just behind his own lines."

The Assistant King's Harbour Master decided to get on with the job.

"I don't know much about this job," he said quite calmly, "so you'd better keep clear."

The Americans drew clear, and I followed their example.

The Scot went to work. It seemed a devil of a long while that we watched as he twiddled and fiddled. But at last he held something aloft and waved. He had done the trick.

Only a little while ago I saw that he had been awarded the D.S.C. for that job. He earned it.

We rode back to Navy House with the trophy, and celebrated the occasion with a drop of Scotch. But by that time I had missed the L.C.I. on the return voyage to Naples.

So down to the harbour again to see what else was sailing south. This morning the Hun was making Anzio more like its reputed self. From time to time I heard that distinctive "pop" of an eighty-eight shell on its last lap. It had been explained to me that this was a booster which the Germans had fitted to these shells to give them a bit extra range. The "pop" was quickly followed by a sharp crack—an air burst scattering fragments of anti-personnel splinters. I found myself instinctively walking on the left-hand side of the road to put the bulwark of ruined buildings between myself and the German gunners.

One of those sea-going elephants, an American tank landing ship, was coming in as I reached the harbour. I waited until she reached the hard and swung open her bow doors. Then her Commanding Officer gladly agreed to give me a ride back to Naples, but he would not be leaving until late in the afternoon. I filled in my time by going visiting my landing-craft friends again.

"Just in time for lunch. Have a beer," was the greeting.

"Thanks. I heard a bit of shelling last night. How did you get on."

"Yes. Hun was pretty hostile last night. It didn't trouble us. Most of it the heavy stuff—Anzio Annie—having a crack at the anchorage. Just threw a lot of seawater about. Nothing more."

At that moment came the ominous pop and crack. It seemed to be just behind the buildings on the waterfront. I started a little but these landing-craft youngsters did not bat an eyelid.

“Ah, signal for another round. Definitely in the area,” said the First Lieutenant.

He explained that when there was any shelling in drinking hours, a shell falling in the immediate harbour area was taken as a signal to refill the glasses. So they opened three more bottles of beer.

After lunch they pulled out into the roads to pick up another load from the merchantmen, and I repaired to my landing ship to while away the time watching the trucks, jeeps and light tanks rolling out of its hold.

At last we were empty, and getting under way for the return voyage. A number of British and American Army officers who were going south for a spot of leave at a rest camp after a long spell in the beach-head were also taking passage.

Although I had been given a cabin for the overnight run, I did not turn in until about three o'clock in the morning. I just sat in the comfortable wardroom of the landing ship, and listened to the Army types, mostly the Americans, talking about Anzio. That is one thing about the Americans. They talk more freely about their battle experiences, yet without boasting. The average English officer does not open up easily. But those American officers gave me a still deeper insight into Anzio. Most interesting of the types was a leathery looking little Dutch-American with a strong foreign accent. Obviously the product of one of those many unassimilated foreign colonies in the United States, though an American citizen born and bred. He was the sort of man for whom war was invented. He just loved guns, and spoke of all types of rifles, pistols and guns with a loving understanding. The Spandau—ah, there was a gun. This gun and that gun, Allied or enemy, he analysed and mentally fondled them all.

He told of two narrow escapes. In the first case, during a hot time at the front, he got separated from his unit. With the enemy shelling heavily, he dodged into a strange dug-out occupied by an American officer of another unit.

As soon as the other American heard the guttural accents, he grabbed for a revolver. The Dutch-American realized in a flash that his compatriot suspected him of being a German in American uniform who had penetrated the lines. The Dutch-American also reached for his .45. There, while enemy shells rained down outside, the two American officers stood in the dug-out, holding each other at the pistol point. The owner of the dug-out kept plugging questions at the Dutch-American, trying to trap him into a mistake which would show that he was not really an American. In the end, however, the Dutchman was able to convince his fellow-American of the truth, and all was well.

“But at one times it was a dam close ting,” he told me. “Joost a question who would shoot first.”

The same chap also gave a very graphic description of his worst

experience. He was fast asleep in a slit trench when a shell lobbed right on the edge. He awoke to find himself buried alive beneath timber and earth, unable to move and steadily suffocating.

"Ja, I am blue in der face and in cold sweat by der time dey dig me out," he said.

So the dark hours rolled on while these officers swapped experiences, and I listened. I learned quite a lot that night.

I asked a British artillery officer what was meant by this "time over target" which I heard mentioned.

He explained this particular system of giving the Hun a headache. When you have your artillery batteries of various calibres scattered over an area and want to bring it all to bear on a confined enemy target with smashing effect, you order a "time over target" barrage. You work out to split-second timing the firing order of each battery so that all shells will fall on the target at the one instant. Rather nasty to be at the receiving end, I should imagine.

I also added to my vocabulary that night the beautifully expressive word "STONK". This is the Army's name for a similar barrage, in which every gun which can be brought to bear is concentrated on one small enemy target, fairly wiping it off the map.

Colonel "Red" Kelly, commanding the Ninth K.O.Y.L.I.s, later told me a good story of a "stonk". An Anzio story. It seems there was a system whereby the unit which got the best day's bag by sniping was awarded a "stonk". The unit could nominate its own time and target, and the artillery then obliged.

"Red" Kelly had observed that in the German unit facing his lads, most of the enemy troops paid their regular visit to the latrines just after breakfast. So he asked that his "stonk" should be for this time and on that target. It worked.

"Really caught them with their pants down that time," he laughed.

That was my postscript to Anzio—land of good camaraderie and eternal smoke, where the landing-craft lads, under prolonged and constant shelling, toted those nasty cargoes of high octane petrol and high explosive come hell or highwater.

## CHAPTER V

### ROMAN REVELS

I ARRIVED back in Naples to find "Tackline" and "Pat" staying as very welcome guests in the small but comfortable Royal Navy Press Mess we had established in a flat overlooking the esplanade and the Bay of Naples.

"How did you get on?" asked "Pat".

"Not at all bad," I told them. "Just a few odd bricks, but nothing to complain of."

"Just your luck," said "Tackline". "You must have struck one of those occasional quiet patches."

So I settled down to rough out a radio script about Anzio, and sent it back to London complete with spot recordings, but it never saw the light of day, or, should I rather say, the thermionic valves.

For the time being I settled back into the slogging routine. Convoys came and convoys went. Supplies and troops still poured into Italy. From the cerie of our fourth-floor flat we saw the cruisers sail regularly to do a bombardment up the coast in support, or the minesweepers outward bound to keep the sea lanes level with the advancing Army.

For the Navy it was one of those deadly periods of waiting, always waiting, which make up so much of war. Only on the other side of Italy, in the Adriatic, was the Navy having an interesting time. Over there the landing-craft boys were running the ferry service to Yugoslavia, while the lads of the Light Coastal Forces (motor torpedo-boats and motor gunboats) and the destroyers spent the nights beating up the enemy's coastwise shipping among the maze of Dalmatian islands.

In Naples the landing-craft boys were browned off with the occasional job of fetching and carrying which were the only break in the routine of waiting. Our friends from these little craft found some solace in the comfort of our shore Mess of which they were honorary members.

Small naval Messes were a feature of shoreside life in Naples in those days. Most of these were established in luxurious flats or villas which had belonged to Fascist bosses now far away in northern Italy with their German masters.

Most luxurious of these was that occupied by the two representatives of the Ministry of War Transport, Mr. Stannard, brother of my V.C. friend, and his winger, in the fashionable suburb of Possilipo. There they were waited upon in true luxury by a Jeeves-like Italian butler-valet, a maid and a cook.

But we of R.N. Mess 192 prided ourselves that we kept the best table in Naples, and our guests, from four-ring captains to landing-craft subbies, confirmed it.

We were waited upon, hand and foot, by two little Italian slaveys, sisters, Conchita and Anna. Conchita was a wisp of a woman, a young widow with three kiddies whose father had been killed in an Allied air raid. This job was her idea of heaven, for she got her rations as a naval "steward", which were ample for her family. In return she gave us such loyalty, honesty and hard work as I would never have expected to find in Naples. And, despite the poor supply of gas, which had to be eked out with the traditional charcoal brazier, she cooked with all her heart. That is why both senior and junior officers were glad of an invitation to our Mess. To give you some idea of the reason I will outline a typical luncheon menu which we generally gave our guests about this time.



Minestrone soup, ravioli, six pounds of asparagus (the cheapest vegetable in Naples in those days), veal escalops with fried potatoes and green beans, salad and cheese, preceded by gin and washed down with a reasonably potable white wine.

So, with entertainment which was part of our stock in trade, and routine duties, time passed dully enough. I was getting rather tired of this seat at the back of the theatre of war.

Then came the first tip-off. No, not the southern second front yet. But an interesting enough little job was in the offing. A little invasion. Elba. The British Navy was to land the French Army on this strategically placed little island which lay astride our prospective minesweeping and sea supply lines as the Army moved northwards. Elba was also a bastion for the enemy coastal supply lines. And this was to be, from the sea aspect, an entirely British show, with a veritable Armada of landing craft, and practically nothing else except those phenomenal little floating fortresses, the China river gunboats, which had come to the Mediterranean from the Far East and done a fine fighting job all the way from Alexandria to Italy.

This looked like being a job which could compete with Cassino for publicity. The trouble was to drum up enough war correspondents to ride along to Elba. Most British newspapers and nearly all American news outfits had long since got tired of attaching a correspondent exclusively to the Navy, and getting no real story out of him for months on end. The trouble is that, while the Army fights pretty steadily, the Navy cannot stage a Fleet action every day for the benefit of the Press—and much of its work is hard but unspectacular slogging.

There was one small pool of war correspondents on which I might draw—in Cairo. And anyway I had a small party of my own, Lieutenant Jack Dodds, Official Naval Reporter, and Lieutenant Denis Oulds, Official Naval Photographer, with Lieutenant Edward Pisani, of Malta, down at Alexandria, and I would need them at this end of the Med. for this job.

Right. I just had time to slip down to Egypt by air, preach the naval gospel to the war correspondents in Cairo, gather a few recruits, and bring my own little Alexandria team back with me to Naples.

The flight in itself was an experience, a tedious one. A hard-seated Dakota is no 'plane for luxury, however well the Air Transport Command, with its fine organization and hospitality, may try to make life easy. Naples to Malta, an overnight stay in the hospitable R.A.F. transit Mess, and then on to Cairo over miles and miles of monotonous sea and desert, flying high above some of the great battlefields of the war but seeing little more than a yellowy-brown flat landscape for monotonous hour after hour. Drop down at El Adem, a grim and desolate aerodrome in the heart of the desert, for lunch.

At last following the straight ribbon of the desert road between Alexandria and Cairo, and so to Cairo.

This was a real hot-gossiping visit, with little time to convert war correspondents that "something mighty interesting" was about to happen with the Navy at the other end of the Mediterranean.

Thanks to an introduction I had to a leading Egyptian family, I had a high-speed tour of the sights of Egypt—the Sphinx, the Pyramids, the Zoo, and the Egyptian Parliament, of which my host was a member, in session. Meetings with old Fleet Street friends such as “Hiram” Parsons, now editor of the official magazine *Parade*; Alan Sinclair, now boss of the Ministry of Information news set-up for the Middle East; and Dick Lewis, former News Editor of the *Sunday Dispatch*, but now a major in a hush-hush job behind the barbed wire of A.F.H.Q., Cairo.

Most piquant rendezvous of all was with Noel Monks, of the *Daily Mail*, and Tom Healy, of the *Daily Mirror*. We dined at the world-famous Sheppard’s Hotel, an ornate hostelry which I will always think of as a cross between a circus and a turkish bath. Perhaps because it was one of Cairo’s meatless days I found the cuisine distinctly mediocre. This was the first time Noel, Tom and I had been together since the days when we were the mainstays of the *Melbourne Herald* poker school way back in 1928.

Next hot and breathless morning came the signal from Naples. Hurry back with my party. It seemed that the Elba operation was getting nearer than expected. So, borrowing an Army car, I raced off across the desert road to Alexandria. Having warned my officers and a couple of local naval correspondents to get ready to hurry to Naples, I arranged to make my number to the local Admiral.

That night I slept fitfully, waking up with alternate fits of shivers and heat-waves. Next morning I felt like death warmed up, but I felt that I must get cracking. Three times I struggled out of bed and tried to climb into white tropical uniform. Three times I fell flat on my face as I tried to climb into trousers. And the third time I stayed on the deck until a black-faced chamberman found me. A couple of hours later I lay in an Army hospital, with my temperature competing well with the sun’s heat and too dizzy to worry about Elba.

Next morning they told me the news. Only sandfly fever, thank heavens—not malaria. All right I was ready to get up and go. The nurse laughed. I would be there for a fortnight. Army officers in adjacent beds laughed. “Nobody ever gets out of here under a fortnight.”

I laid bets freely that I would be out in three days. They laughed and confidently accepted the bets. It was a terrific battle with the R.A.M.C. major, but I won my freedom and the bets in the end by signing a chit exonerating the medical staff from any responsibility for any sequel.

So, still running a bit of a temperature, I flew direct back to Naples, feeling rather like an animated corpse.

What a change in R.N. Mess 192. The flat was packed out with war correspondents and my own officers. Our landing-craft friends came in to have a drink and compare notes about the job to come. Everyone had a fair idea what was in prospect.

Then came the sad news. The operation was postponed. The French

Army reported that it was not ready for the job. Anti-climax. There I had a bunch of news-hungry newshawks assembled in Naples, all keyed up for a real headline story—and suddenly we found ourselves all dressed-up and nowhere to go.

Once more that boring period of waiting which I really believe is the worst part of war. Luckily a couple of the war correspondents from Alexandria had not been with the Navy in these waters before, and they were glad to go up the coast on the bombarding jobs with the cruisers, or a minesweeping job. Julian Gruneberg, of the United Press of America, and Steve Barber, of the American Associated Press, turned some quite good copy out on these assignments which were just "old stuff" to the other war correspondents who had gone blase in Italy.

As for myself, the reaction from the sandfly caught up with me, and I had to go to the Navy's own island for a rest cure. This was in a way lucky, for it was here that I found another section of "forgotten men" of the little fleet—the minesweeping motor launches, or M/S M.L.s for short.

The Island of Ischia, a northern outpost of the Bay of Naples, was one of the finest bits of work done by the Navy in the field of amenities.

Of course, the Island of Capri is the show-place. It was "owned" by the United States Army Air Force, who did not like visitors, and made it difficult to get a pass to stay there. The U.S. Air Force, from my experience, sometimes regards itself as a law unto itself, and acts accordingly—and tough. There is one story about Capri which I enjoyed.

A British destroyer, needing to lie alongside the jetty at Capri for a while to lower a boat and make a trifling repair, hauled in and made fast. Immediately a hard-boiled American military policeman, with an exaggerated sense of his own importance, stepped on board and ambled up to the bridge. He accosted the Commanding Officer in casual style.

M.P.: "Say, Cap'n, where's your pass?"

C.O.: "What pass?"

M.P.: "Say, Cap'n. Everyone's got to have a pass from the Army Air Force to come here. Where's yourn?"

The Commanding Officer of the British destroyer, angered by the drawling insolence of this American who had sauntered up to his bridge, took the intruder by the elbow, spun him around to face aft and pointed at the White Ensign flying there as he said:

"There's my pass to go anywhere in this world. Now, damn you, get off my ship."

Ischia, similarly, was "owned" by the British Navy, but our friends the "pongoes", both British and American Army types, did not find it difficult to get a pass to stay there. In peacetime the island was the holiday resort of Continental middle-class families, Italians, Swiss, French and Germans, who wanted value for their money and did not want to pay the prices which Capri charged on the strength of its much publicized name and its Blue Grotto. Ischia also made much of its

medicinal mud baths and radio-active springs which were supposed to be the cure for rheumatism, arthritis, neuritis, chest troubles, sterility and gynaecological diseases, not to mention dyspepsia, gastritis, stone in the bladder and inflammation of the liver. Right now it was curing war weariness. Its many hotels and spas had been taken over as rest camps for war-weary or convalescing fighting men. According to legend Ischia was created as a sort of super-brick by Jupiter to hurl against the rebellious Titans, burying the Giant, Tipheus, whose anger kept the volcanic springs going.

The Navy had merely taken it over as a going concern, complete with giant and mud baths. A two-hour run by ferry from Naples brought you into the picturesque little harbour. From there you went to one of the many rest camps, or, as in my case, to the Officers' Convalescent Home, a comfortable hotel where you did what you liked, dressed as you liked, got up when you liked and generally lazed.

Life in Ischia consisted of eating, drinking the reasonably good local wine, lazing, bathing and sleeping. For the more energetic, walking was the main occupation. I even got up enough energy on one occasion to walk miles across the island to an isolated little hostelry run by a German woman and her Italian fisherman husband. There you could eat like a fighting cock, picking your own lobster alive from a trap moored in the tiny fishing anchorage, and browse through the visitors' book which contained such signatures as those of Edda Ciano and von Mackensen, the Nazi Ambassador from Rome.

A notice on the board at the convalescent home announced that all officers staying there were automatically honorary members of the Light Coastal Forces Mess in the Albergo Floridiana, a smart, modern caravanserai in Ischia proper, with a balcony looking out over the sea. That is how I found another branch of the "forgotten fleet", the lads of the minesweeping motor-launches. They were a cheerful bunch of cronies with reasonably good thirsts, and their company was a tonic for convalescents.

I spent several cheery evenings sitting with them on the balcony of a warm summer's evening, drinking vermouth and "vino", joking, laughing, chewing the fat and watching the nightly dance of the innumerable winking fireflies which are a beautiful feature of Ischia.

And around noon—gin time—they would make you welcome on board their comfortable craft at the base in one corner of the little Ischia harbour, where the M.L.s lay moored stem to quay when they returned from sweeping mines off the Italian coast to the nor'ard.

These H.D.M.L.s (Harbour Defence Motor Launches), now fitted for the more hazardous duty of sweeping mines, are my idea of a comfortable motor-yacht for coastwise cruising in days of peace. They are spacious, with good accommodation for both ratings and officers, and reasonably good deck space.

For instance, the wardroom aft is like a miniature destroyer wardroom, with settees on either side, a table, sideboard, comfortable chairs. The settees convert into comfortable bunks at night. On either side of

the entrance to the wardroom are little cubby-holes of pantry and lavatory wash-place. All very compact. And the craft themselves are reasonable sea-boats, though they can roll like blazes in any sort of a sea.

Among the lads were some of my old friends of Sicilian days with whom I spent happy hours yarning over past rendezvous in Augusta or Malta. Like all the youngsters of the British Navy they had quickly picked up the new art of minesweeping, and they also numbered Anzio among their battle honours.

These young veterans of the Mediterranean campaign made light of their many adventures between Algiers and Anzio, of working under enemy shellfire or of battling out the not to be despised Mediterranean storms which form a terrific test for little craft like these. They joked about such adventures as picking up a mine in a sweep and being thus moored to sudden death.

They preferred to tell laughing stories of the perils of Ischia—the night that British matelots fought a battle with a bunch of insolent Italian sailors who had managed to get hold of some grenades and bayonets, or of bottles of cognac “made in half an hour” by enterprising Italians.

Not least of the perils of Ischia was the prevalence of venereal disease even worse than in Naples itself. The first matelots to arrive in this seeming Paradise found this out to their sorrow, but the authorities quickly tackled the problem.

The actual tackling was done by a young Scottish doctor, a lieutenant-commander R.N.V.R., who became a sort of “King of Ischia”. In actuality the island was governed by a triumvirate: an Army officer, a solicitor in peacetime, who was Military Governor of Ischia and adjacent smaller islands; the Naval Officer in Charge, who was boss of the M.L.s; and the Doc.

The Doc nearly lost his life in Ischia when he caught smallpox while suppressing an outbreak which he nipped in the bud. Although he was severe with the local Italians, and would not stand for any of their normal nonsense, he won their admiration and almost their worship, and when he left the whole island almost went into mourning.

He told me something about the tough fight he had at the beginning to get some sense into the health system of Ischia. He found the island practically without medicines, and riddled with Fascist graft. The medical set-up in Ischia was a sad reflection of the depths of Fascism.

But Doc's biggest fight was against venereal disease, which he did much towards suppressing. The islanders were astonished. They had long regarded this scourge as more or less one of the ordinary evils of life. Doc had a hard time when he came to segregating the sufferers. He first invented a system whereby a woman who was known to be infected had her head shaven as a warning sign to any amorous matelot. Then the Doc found that a new fashion had sprung up in the island. All the women started wearing scarves wound round their heads like turbans, and very smart they looked in this headgear. So Doc had to go a

step forward. No woman wearing such headgear, it was ordered, could ride on the rickety old buses which linked village to village on the island. This had some effect, but not much. Segregation was the only answer, but how.

Nothing could beat the Doc. With his cheery smile and beguiling Scottish tongue he charmed the Mother Superior of a local nunnery into setting aside a part of her building as an isolation hospital for the "fallen women". He also managed to organize some nurses out of nothing. When the smallpox finally got him he was fast winning his battle against the scourge.

Doc had such influence in Ischia that the locals all brought their problems to him. This once nearly started a lynching party.

It was a time of serious shortage of food in Ischia. The people flocked round to his hospital to ask him to do something about it. The Doc, knowing that some local bosses, mostly undetected Fascists, were not doing too badly, suggested to the crowd that they go and investigate why their own bigwigs still looked so sleek, and ask them to part up.

In the end this led to the discovery that one of the local bosses had a really fine illegal store of foodstuffs. It was found by the police, who rushed to save this grafter from being lynched by his fellow-islanders. That was one little crook the less. He was shipped away to prison on the mainland.

So, between yarning with Doc, drinking with the Light Coastal Forces lads, visiting the tinpot little cinema of the island now reserved for the Allied forces, eating, sleeping and lazing, the week slipped by. Soon I was on my way back to Naples by ferry, refreshed in both body and mind.

Elba was still deferred, and, at the rate the Army was going after finally smashing through Cassino, it looked as though they might get so far to the north that they would render the Elba job unnecessary. The correspondents were getting a bit bored. They wanted action.

Just then came word of an interim job which might keep them quiet for a bit.

A few thousand troops were to be taken to Anzio as reinforcements, ready for the break-out of the beach-head to link up with their comrades driving northwards. Now Anzio was about to pay dividends. It was packed with supplies. The Navy and the Army in combination, and largely due to the efforts of the landing-craft boys, had done a great job in plugging stores into Anzio. Now the Army was having the unique experience of advancing towards its long prepared supply dumps.

The reinforcement of the beach-head meant that the big assault to capture Rome was due very soon.

"And if the enemy's ever going to react," I was told by a senior officer, "he should try to get a crack at this convoy of landing craft going up with the reinforcements. He's bound to know. We can't very well hide such a bunch from his agents down here, and he'll also pick 'em up on Radar. So we may have some E-boat trouble, or even more on this trip."

With this prospect of trouble to brighten up the war correspondents, I loaded my little team into the American infantry landing craft and landing ships which were making the run. I myself decided to make the run in an escorting minesweeper.

But it all turned out a lucky trip—though not for war correspondents. The enemy, whether he knew or not, just did not “react”. I spent a day in a minesweeper lying off the beach-head, watching the familiar landmarks and the eternal smoke once more. The landing craft went in and discharged their troops and supplies, and scarcely a single brick was chucked at them by the eighty-eights of “Anzio Annie”. Tom Healy, who made his first visit to Anzio, did write a good piece for the London *Daily Mirror*, and the American agency boys scored a bit of space in the newspapers back in the United States. So the effort was not wasted. P. J. and Norman Fisher of Paramount newsreel made the voyage in an American tank landing ship whose hospitable “owner” had some cases of beer. So they were satisfied with the trip too.

Still we waited. Not only the war correspondents, but the landing-craft types were getting restive too. The Army was moving fast. Anzio erupted. Rome fell. Still the Army swept northwards. And still the Elba operation was delayed.

Most of the war correspondents quickly moved into Rome, and P.J. chased along with them as First Lieutenant of my little party to maintain contact. In the squalor of Naples I sat and fumed, for it seemed as if the Navy was to be done out of its only decent story since Anzio. All to the good, if it comes to saving lives. But fighting men, however sensible, have a way of hating inaction. The landing-craft boys wanted to get cracking, I wanted to get cracking, and the war correspondents wanted to get cracking.

About this time I began to notice that I was getting jumpy. As I sat in an office at Navy House planning the disposition of war correspondents for the invasion of Elba, I found that when somebody entered quietly and said “Good morning”, I would jump about a foot out of my chair. Something had to be done.

Well, there are only two forms of emotional release—women or wine. The first was out of the question in my case, for a variety of reasons, not least of which was a happy home in England. So a good binge was indicated.

Just about then P.J. arrived down from Rome in the jeep to report the set-up there. He had got in as the Germans got out, and the war correspondents were now established in an hotel which had been hurriedly evacuated by German officers who were in such a hurry that they left both their baggage and their baggages behind them.

Apparently the baggages went home and thought things out. They decided to switch their allegiance. War is war, but a girl must live. That evening the war correspondents were surprised to find smashing blondes and brunettes rolling in to visit them in their bedrooms. Well—war is war and a war correspondent must live. But next day things were straightened out, and girls, except visitors in uniforms, were

barred completely from the premises. Morality came into its own again.

From what P.J. told me Rome was Paradise where Naples was Hades.

Rome—clean streets, no bomb damage, washed-looking people, good-looking girls, fine shops—and a less poisonous, though equally potent, variety of liquor.

That was the ticket. I could kill two birds with one stone. Go to Rome and brief the correspondents as far as security permitted, and get the jitters out of my system.

So off in the jeep. Go by the coastal road. That was a revealing journey. It was the first time I had had a really close-up view of inhabited countryside which had been the scene of battle after battle. Across the Garigliano River and on northwards, through town after town which had been shattered by the tide of war.

As I gazed at such towns as Formia, I could not help seeing them as though they were Dorking or Guildford. It was a sad sight, a frightening sight, these mountains of rubble which were once just such jolly little market towns as Aylesbury or Yeovil. And among these masses of ruin the civilians, black-clad, dirty, blank-eyed, scrabbled among the dust and broken bricks and timber trying to rake together some sort of primitive home again. And I gave thanks to Heaven that Britain had been spared the real tide of warfare.

Then up over a terrible road into the Alban Hills—past Castel Gandolfo with the Papal flag flying, and then steeply down into Rome with the dome of St. Peter's Basilica gleaming distantly in the sunshine.

We were booked to stay with P.J.'s brother-in-law, Colonel "Red" Kelly, whose 9th K.O.Y.L.I.s were out of the line and resting after doing a good job in the break-out from Anzio. We found his headquarters established in a big villa along the road to Ostia. The Navy prides itself on hospitality. The 9th K.O.Y.L.I.s seemed to be bent on beating us at our own game.

I started to get the jitters out of my system that very night at the party which the K.O.Y.L.I.s threw in our honour. And the soldier whom they had as barman in their Mess was a genius at making Italian alcohol into really fine drinks, with the aid of the small ration of Scotch and gin.

Next morning we were going to tour Rome, and when the time came for departure, "Red" Kelly sprang a surprise. His men had captured a German armoured car which he had converted into his command car. This was brought round to the door to take us to Rome. No insignificant jeep labelled, "PRESS RELATIONS—C. in C. MED" for us today. We would do Rome in style.

With three naval officers poking their heads and torsos out of the turret, like a motor gunboat on wheels, we rolled into the Eternal City. Past the Colosseum and on to the Victor Emmanuel Monument—that white monstrosity in the heart of the city. All was as I remember from my visit here as a young newspaperman fresh from Australia.



I could not help wondering why the American Red Cross, which seemed to have a touch for the flamboyant, had not commandeered this architectural horror of a monument for a club, and boarded it in with beaver-board for the purpose.

By way of the Corso Umberto with its busy throngs, about half of whom were men in Allied uniforms of every variety, and through the Pincian Gardens, we found our way at last to the Hotel Citta, where the war correspondents now lived in considerably more comfort and with a much finer bar than they had enjoyed in Naples or Algiers.

From the height of the turret we surveyed the passing world with an ineffable feeling of superiority.

Yes. Rome was all that P.J. had promised. Clean, unscarred, full of interest even to a Goth and Vandal like myself who did not attach much value to the classic aspects of the Eternal City. Perhaps the seeming prosperity was superficial, but the shops seemed to be stocked with a greater and richer variety of goods than I had seen in London for years past.

It appeared to be the dream city of a fighting man on leave, with its comfortable hotels commandeered for the uniformed visitors, its bustle, its clean-looking people.

Most pleasant rendezvous of all was the Allied Officers' Club established in the Villa Borghesi, in the Pincian Gardens, with its well-controlled prices, and a good dinner with decent wine on the balcony which overlooked all Rome.

After a night of pleasant revelry, I joined next morning one of the strangest "parades" in the world. His Holiness the Pope was giving his daily public audience. I found my way early to the Vatican City. But already there were many fighting men ahead of me.

Across the great square of St. Peter's and through the great bronze doors lay the route for us, both the Faithful and the merely curious. At the main doorway stood the sentries of the Swiss Guard, handsome and husky youngsters clad in their traditional "Number Ones", richly coloured mediaeval uniforms—all reds, yellows and blues—which make you realize how much colour we have lost out of our lives since the days of the Renaissance. Even the Swiss Guards in their "working rig" of powder blue pantaloons and jackets with black beret-like hats were birds of paradise compared with the drab khaki-clad figures which flowed past them in a steadily growing stream.

Through the bronze doors lay a stretch of lofty corridor which dwarfed the throng of men who hurried forward to see the greatest spiritual leader of the world. (I am not a Catholic myself.)

And ahead of us lay the greatest staircase in the world, wide, lofty and seeming to lead to the stars.

Ahead of me a mass of thousands of uniformed figures were already edging up this vast staircase step by step. Behind me hundreds more hurried up to join the throng. Step at a time we climbed. From the higher levels I looked back upon a sea of heads. Here were men from every corner of the earth come to see the Holy Father. Khaki, of course,

predominated. But what a variety of khaki! British, Americans, French. Men who wore the shoulder flashes of Australia, New Zealand, Mauritius, Jamaica. Indian warriors. Coal-black soldiers from Africa. American merchant seamen in blue denim overalls. This was micro-cosmography. This terrific mass of khaki was leavened with the dots of white of British naval officers in tropical rig.

At last we were ushered into the audience hall, lofty and richly decorated with murals, by officers of the Papal household in rich wine-red knee breeches, supervised by a chamberlain in black court dress.

At one end of the hall stood a dais with a throne, and a small front section before the dais was cordoned off by a barrier. I was astonished to find that officers were ushered to the front, while ratings and other ranks were packed behind the barrier right to the rear of the hall. Surely this segregation could not be the wish of the Vicar of Christ. I subsequently discovered that the American authorities in control of Rome had asked His Holiness to make such an arrangement for the sake of discipline, and he had graciously agreed. I believe that this system was later abolished.

Perhaps it was due to one of the most grotesque scenes which the Vatican had ever witnessed. It had happened soon after the Allied entry into Rome, and was still the talk of the war correspondents.

An audience of the Pope had been arranged for the newspaper correspondents and photographers of the world. All had gone well and with proper dignity until some real go-getter types of American photographers broke loose. Thrusting all before them they crowded in on the Pope, shoving cameras at him and popping off the blinding flash bulbs right in his eyes. They lay on the floor to get angle shots, ignoring all the horrified protests of members of the Papal household and the deprecating gestures of His Holiness himself. One little yahoo of a picture-snatcher was even heard shouting: "Gee, c'mon, Pope. Give us a grin."

"For a while it was just like a zoo," Tom Healy told me.

Apologies were subsequently presented by all reputable journalists and photographers who were there for the behaviour of the few yahoos who had caused the scene.

So perhaps there may have been some reason for the barrier, but hardly for the arbitrary distinction between officers and men.

As each of us entered the audience hall we were presented with a tiny blue envelope bearing the Papal arms. Inside was a Papal medal to mark the occasion and convey the blessing of His Holiness.

And there we waited for what seemed hours, until at last came a bustle and a buzz. Through a great curtained doorway came a small, slight bespectacled figure clad in white with a white skullcap.

Small of stature he was, but his dynamic personality was that of a giant, making you forget mere outward appearances. As he went to the throne on the dais, picturesque officers of the Swiss Guard formed up on either hand.

In clear though accented English the Pope bade us welcome, and

finished with his blessing upon us and upon all our loved ones far away. His speech and blessing were forceful in their simplicity, even to a sheer heathen like myself.

In a few minutes the ceremony was over. As His Holiness moved slowly towards the doorway, the crowd surged forward to pay him homage. Smilingly, graciously he went. We had met a very great little man.

Then I had the good fortune to find as guide another dignitary of the Church, the former Titular Archbishop of Smyrna, Archbishop Falla, of Malta. I had turned to speak to my neighbour, a lieutenant-commander of naval Commandos, first cousins of the landing-craft boys and of the same kidney. He had been brought there by Archbishop Falla, who now came to escort him out.

The Archbishop who, as a man of Malta, had a predilection for British naval officers, went to some trouble to show us the Sistine Chapel and some of the byeways of the Vatican itself before we emerged into the inner courtyard where my brother officers' jeep stood conspicuously among the fine, gleaming cars of Papal officials and members of the Diplomatic Corps.

And so back into the everyday life of Rome proper, which seemed so drab in contrast to the pageantry and colour which was the Vatican.

Another day with the war correspondents and the K.O.Y.L.I.s found me clear of the jitters and ready to return to Naples.

This time, with P.J. still driving the jeep, we decided to take the alternative route southwards which would carry us through Cassino. It had been an easy drive up, particularly that dead straight stretch of road across the flooded Pontine Marshes, one of the great reclamation achievements of Benito Mussolini, which his pal, Adolf Hitler, had tried his best to ruin. We had been warned that the inland route was much tougher, but we decided to take it to see the battlefield which had been the scene of some of the bitterest fighting of the Italian campaign.

Once more it was the procession of ruined towns, but the actual road was not as tough as we had expected. Then, gleaming in the sunlight atop a great hill some miles ahead of us we saw it—the shell of the war-smashed monastery of Monte Cassino.

Past signs which warned us that no vehicle must stop in the ruins of the village of Cassino we swept into this modern miniature Pompeii, village of death. It was a scene of terrible desolation. Not even the shell of this once gay and beautiful township remained. Small mounds of rubble marked a few of its more prominent buildings. The road was fenced in with barbed wire, marked by warnings against leaving the highway and wandering into the still unlifted minefields.

And there, in the midst of this scene of utter desolation, man-made, steel-swept desolation, two neatly kept graves shone white near the little river which ran through what had once been a village. As we swept past we picked out the names. They were those of two correspondents, friends of ours, who had been killed in the wake of the infantry who had finally captured Cassino. These two, one of them a fellow-

Australian, MacDonald, had driven into a minefield in their jeep. I wondered who, amid all this desolation, had kept their graves so neat.

On the outskirts of the village we stopped for a few minutes to look back. Through the ruins of the monastery shone the golden sunlight. Cassino's meagre ruins lay in the shadow of the mountainside. All was peaceful. Nature had already begun to throw her green shroud over the scarred earth. It seemed trite, but through my mind there ran the refrain—"Where only man is vile—where only man is vile."

I dug P.J. in the ribs, and almost shouted:

"Let's go—and to hell with sentiment."

But for the rest of the way into Naples we did not talk much.

## CHAPTER VI

### LANDING CRAFT ARMADA

A FEW days later the "press gang" assembled in Naples. By this time the Army had reached a point on the mainland nearly opposite Elba. We were already wondering whether the Hun would not haul out of the island before we got there to chase him out.

"Tackline" and "Pat" had already sailed for the assembly areas in Corsica, and two of my officers had gone off to join Rear-Admiral Thomas Troubridge's headquarters ship, the *Royal Scotsman*, at Ajaccio.

I was to leave with my party in the last batch of L.C.I.s to sail from Naples for Porto Vecchio, on the east coast of Corsica. It was quite a representative little cavalcade that I conducted to Potsuoli to join the landing craft. Tall, quietly spoken Frank Jones, a veteran of the last war, representing Reuters; young Steve Barber, of the A.P.; hefty Norman Fisher, of Movietone Newsreel; Pat Conger, of the United Press; grizzled Chan Sedgwick, of the *New York Times*; quiet and efficient Reg Parker, of the Exchange Telegraph; Lieutenant Bill Brinkley, U.S.N., representing the American Services Journal, *Stars and Stripes*; and two excellent French war correspondents, M.M. Montaron and Pistor, who, to my utter astonishment, had no idea where they were going. It had been my experience in the past that if the French were to have a big hand in any operation, all their people knew well in advance what was doing, no matter what the need for security. But maybe I had misjudged our Gallic allies.

Commander Sergeant, one of the most experienced Squadron Commanders of landing craft in the Mediterranean, was our host for the voyage to Corsica. And a pleasant voyage it was, steaming comfortably across a smooth and sun-bathed ocean on the first lap of what was to be the biggest operation carried out by landing craft alone.

About noon next day we steamed into the land-locked harbour of

Porto Vecchio to join the throng of landing craft of many varieties assembled there. Near the entrance lay that good old peacetime packet-boat, the *Royal Scotsman*—now H.M.S. *Royal Scotsman*—wearing the White Ensign and Admiral Troubridge's flag. Not far from her lay the only "big ships" for this operation, two of the China river gunboats, the *Aphis* and *Cockchafer*, if I remember rightly. And away down the harbour astern of them lay the landing craft, L.C.T.s, L.C.I.s, L.C.G.s, L.C.F.s, and other varieties, including those weird-looking craft which lay smokescreens with acid and aeroplane propellers. And this was only a section of the great assemblage for the Elba operation.

A quick dip over the side, a shift into an immaculate suit of Number Tens carefully saved for the occasion, and I was ready to repair on board the flagship to discuss the arrangements for the Press. I need not have worried. Never before have naval officers planning an operation gone to such trouble to integrate the war correspondents into the complicated machinery of their plan.

All that remained to me for the moment was to approve the lay-out for my party, and accept an invitation to dine in the flagship that night. The roomy, round-bellied old packet-boat was packed with staff officers, many of them living in cubby-holes of cabins which were like sweat boxes, never having been intended to be anything more than overnight sleeping-berths for English travellers in a much milder clime. But the officers of the *Royal Scotsman* were a cheery crowd. No "pusser" formality nonsense about them.

Eat, drink and be merry—and tomorrow morning comes the "briefing". Bring the war correspondents along too, was the unexpected order. The correspondents were astonished. They had always found the naval security system to be the stiffest of the lot. It was the custom to embark the correspondents in the ships in which they were to sail on an operation without telling them a thing about it until they were safe at sea. But here they were to see for the first time an operation in the making, and then take part in it.

In this case it was cast-iron safe, for in Porto Vecchio they had no point of contact with the outside world. And anyway I have always regarded ninety-nine per cent of war correspondents as completely trustworthy in matters of security. Journalism has its traditions as well as the Navy.

So ashore the next morning, and to the briefing place. We landed at a staging, and could not miss the direction. All we had to do was to join the ant-like stream of naval officers who were heading along a dirt road to a big marquee surrounded by tents. There the landing-craft lads, officers from every ship in the harbour, were standing around talking in groups. There was an air of expectancy.

The sun was just getting into its stride, and before long we were sizzling gently, although we were only wearing a campaigning rig of khaki shorts and shirts. Inside the marquee it was shady, but ovenlike, even though the side walls were rolled up on one side.

Everyone began to drift into the marquee and find seats on the

rows of wooden benches which filled most of the big tent. At the other end were chairs for the staff officers and Admiral Troubridge, and to one side was a blackboard on an easel. It was like some tropical school. That is precisely what it was—a school of war.

Then I got a further surprise. As each war correspondent filed into the tent to take a seat at the back, he was handed a copy of the operational orders. It is probably the only time that a whole group of war correspondents have been treated by the Royal Navy as though they were officers actually engaged on the operation. That is precisely what they were. They were to sail in the landing craft, sharing the hazards and discomforts of the "show" with the officers and crews of the little ships to which they were allocated, and with a specific job to do.

After all a war correspondent is doing a most important job in fostering both Service and civilian morale. They earn and wear the campaign ribbons of the theatres of operation in which they serve; to a certain degree they come under military discipline; and a comparatively high percentage have been killed or wounded in action. They have sailed in the toughest convoys, have played their part in naval actions, have landed with Commandos in the first wave of an attack; and jumped with paratroops. They have done everything there is to do in warfare, been in the tightest corners, and acquitted themselves with high honour.

When a war correspondent sails with the Navy he is accorded the status of a lieutenant, and is given a chit to record this in case he should fall into the hands of the enemy. I had furnished all my party with these pleasantly reassuring little chits, so now they were attending the briefing as members of the Senior Service.

Nevertheless I was delighted to find that they were being treated in this way. For the Navy, with its sometimes exaggerated sense of security, has at times tended to treat war correspondents as welcome but strange camp followers, to be given the best of hospitality but not to be admitted to the inner secrets until the fun is just about to start. As it turned out, I was glad that they attended this "briefing" and realized that the hot corners in which they subsequently found themselves were not of my malicious designing.

The correspondents themselves were delighted to receive individual copies of the orders, to hear the briefing talks and be able to study out the shape of things to come in advance of the job.

These orders, headed "OPERATION BRASSARD", as the Elba "show" was termed, were the blue-print of the job. They consisted of a veritable book of roneod foolscap sheets stapled together. This book gave all instructions about sailing times, rendezvous, swept channels, dispositions, waiting areas and all the other details of an invasion.

We rambled through the mass of instructions and advice while we sat in the tent, smoking and mopping our brows. Then Admiral Troubridge entered, followed by his staff. Everybody rose, and he waved us back to our benches. We got straight down to business.

Staff officer followed staff officer in explaining and amplifying the operations orders. The gunnery officer. The navigating officer. The intelligence officer. They each had their turn.

Finally the Admiral himself. "Tom" Troubridge, to give him the soubriquet which the officers under his command have always given him with affection, is one of the most distinctive Flag Officers of the Senior Service, and comes from a great naval family. One of his direct ancestors had been a distinguished captain under Nelson, and had sailed and fought in these very waters in the old days.

Admiral Troubridge is a large man—tall, broad and of noticeable girth. I suppose he can be a "tiger" if necessary, but his natural mood, as I found it, is merry. No affectation. Always a cordial greeting for the most junior of officers around him, with a smile ever ready to crease his round, kindly face and set his eyes a-dancing. Almost a Falstaffian figure, but by no means gross.

There he stood before us, giving us the final picture of the operation to come.

It was not his fault that Operation Brassard began to sound like a push-over. The French had supplied the intelligence for the reports, and, to put it charitably, they were distinctly too optimistic.

To hear Admiral Troubridge describe it, on the basis of the French intelligence reports, it looked like being an interesting little exercise. There were believed to be only about 800 enemy troops left in the island, and most of these were impressed Poles or other non-Germans who had no stomach for fight. Those who had not already bunked into the hills, had their bags packed ready to get to blazes out of Elba when we showed up.

The enemy batteries were being bashed by air, and they would finally be taken care of by the French Commandos who were to form the spearhead of the landing for just such a purpose. The assault would be launched not long before dawn, and by the end of the day most of the island should be in our hands.

The French troops in the main would consist of those coal-black Senegalese, tough customers with a child-like faith in their white officers and a murderous capability with the machete-like knife they carried for close fighting, followed by those colonial gentlemen of even more sinister reputation, the Goums, whose striped uniform robes look rather like a dressing-gown. These Goums from the mountains of North Africa are, like the Gurkhas of the Indian Army, some of the finest professional killers of the world. For mountain fighting it would be a close contest between Goums and Gurkhas, though the latter are far better disciplined. Once the Goum is on the enemy man-trail in inaccessible mountains, nothing will stop him. He has got the smell of blood.

I have often thought that one of the toughest predicaments in this world would be to be a German in a slit trench, with a Gurkha coming at one from the north, a Goum from the south, a Senegalese from the east and a Maori from the west. The only answer I can think of is to

take one of your own grenades, pull out the pin and hold it close to you to be blown into Paradise in one piece.

For this operation some of the tank landing craft were also going to carry pack-mules. The crews of craft chosen for this honour were speculating how long it would take to get the smell of these animals out of their ships again. The Goums do not seem to mind the aroma of mules, but it is rather strong for the nostrils of a British matelot. It is a sort of acquired taste in perfumes.

Considerable experiments had been made to find whether it was better to stow mules facing fore and aft or athwartships. What the final decision was I do not remember, but those mules should have appreciated all the forethought about their comfort. We were all rather amused about this side of the operation—all of us except, of course, the officers of the landing craft which were to have the four-legged passengers. And, as is the way when an operation is impending, we laughed easily at anything, including that interesting bit of information that a mule might suffer the agonies of hades from sea-sickness, but it could not get rid of the misery by being nice and sick like a human being.

So now we knew the whole set-up and we filed out into the baking sunshine again. I got hold of the Secretary, and asked him if the Admiral would meet the war correspondents. Of course he would. A few minutes later he came across to be introduced to my little team, which had just been reinforced by an American Army Press Relations Officer, Captain Quigley, a tough, stocky and monopolistic Yank whose perfect control of the French language had been gained, like some of his medal ribbons, by service in the famous French Foreign Legion.

"Tom" Troubridge quickly endeared himself to those correspondents as he stood there swapping jokes with them and answering their questions, serious and flippant.

They all noticed the Admiral's own special badge, a neat little pair of binoculars about the size of opera glasses which always dangled on his chest, contrasting in size with the man who wore them. I don't remember ever seeing him without them ashore or afloat until he fetched up in the Admiralty as Fifth Sea Lord. I even began to wonder if, just as Goering was supposed to wear his medals, Admiral Troubridge perhaps wore his binoculars over his pyjamas.

The correspondents asked him about the operation in prospect, and about his famous Nelsonian ancestor.

"Have you ever visited Elba yourself, sir?" asked one correspondent.

"A long while ago," he answered.

"Have you seen Napoleon's villa, sir?"

"Oh yes, I paid a visit there."

"What was it like, sir?"

"Well—about all I can remember of it now is that in the bedroom Napoleon used to use was the biggest nude mural I've ever seen."

"Tom" Troubridge seemed to know what would interest war correspondents. A few more quips and he went off to return to his flagship. The *Royal Scotsman* was not destined to sail to Elba. Admiral Troubridge



would sail to the operation in an L.C.H., an L.C.I. converted into a headquarters craft by covering in some of the deck space and packing the craft with wireless and Radar equipment and an operations room.

Now I had to get cracking. Leaving most of my Naples party in the craft at Porto Vecchio, whence they would sail direct to Elba, I had to get off to Bastia with a couple of the gang to place them in the other half of the armada which would sail from there.

I had had my little moan to the Admiral about having to remain behind in Bastia, at least for the first stage, as censor as well as P.R.O. This was annoying, particularly as it looked like being a simple party, with lots of "fun and games" and not too much muck flying.

"Tom" Troubridge had given me a comforting pat on the back, and said: "Hard luck, Blore, but somebody's got to stay behind and do the real hard work. The donkey work."

After scrounging a spot of food from old friends in a tank landing craft, I reached the flagship just in time to catch an Italian MAS-boat which was taking the Chief of Staff, a taciturn and stern-faced captain, north to Bastia. Now an Italian motor anti-submarine boat, to give the MAS-boat its extended title, is one of the fastest things which goes on water. It is also one of the noisiest things afloat. The scruffy-looking Italians who manned it could converse only by roaring into each other's ears up there on the little bridge.

We sat behind, on a hatch, clinging on, with the wind tearing at us. As there was a bit of a lop on the open sea we could not go flat out, but had to be content with ambling northwards at a mere forty miles an hour. That was plenty as the MAS-boat jarred its way from wavelet to wavelet, nosing up a shower of spray from time to time and jarring every bone in my body.

Silently we watched the panorama of rugged grandeur which is Corsica slipping mountainously past away there to port. At first it was a fascinating sight, but all too soon I was more conscious of my buttocks, which, on this hard perch, were being battered black and blue by the vibration and jarring of this beastly speedboat. And it was with a sigh of relief that I looked ahead and saw more landing craft lying in the anchorage off the tiny harbour of Bastia. Yes, short of an aircraft, this was certainly the way to get about. Porto Vecchio to Bastia in about an hour and a half. As a final gesture, the cobelligerent young officer in command of this sea-going racehorse opened up the throttle and we fairly leapt towards the entrance to the harbour. My buttocks registered their last, final protest, and we were gliding into the main basin of Bastia harbour and alongside a wharf.

Gingerly testing each strained joint, I ambled towards the headquarters landing craft which was lying in a corner to the harbour. A few minutes later I forgot all about my aches and pains, and a bottom which, I felt sure, would never be quite the same again. For, on making my number on board the headquarters craft, I was greeted by a four-ring captain with the news that all the nice cut-and-dried arrangements made for the correspondents were haywire. They should go in different

craft if they wanted a proper view of the operation. This officer, Captain Turner (popularly known as "Flash Alf"—but not to his face), was in charge of the naval side of the operation under the direction of Admiral Troubridge.

He conducted me to an operations room on the adjacent landing stage, and showed me the situation on a blackboard. Eventually, to my relief, we found we could fix the allocations by a few minor adjustments.

Then off in a jeep to the local A.F.H.Q. in a big stone building way up the hill overlooking Bastia proper. This had been a large convent school for girls. It came as a bit of a shock to see black-robed nuns emerging through great double doors from the wing still reserved to them and passing down the corridor, threading their way among fighting men of the Allied nations. War makes strange neighbours.

In what had been the classrooms and dormitories of this convent school were now established the offices and wireless-cluttered signal rooms of British, American and French Army, Navy and Air Forces. The building buzzed like a beehive, but not with childish voices any longer.

And right at the top of this three-storey building which had never heard of a lift I found the Press Relations office. The two Field Press Censors, one American and the other British, sent by the Army to cope with the military side of the correspondents' copy on Operation Brassard, had already installed themselves. We discussed the set-up. An R.A.F. censor came in and joined us. The American and R.A.F. censors were to remain with me in Bastia, and the British Army censor was to go to Elba. This latter arrangement was necessary because Captain Quigley, sailing from Porto Vecchio, was taking with him a bunch of carrier pigeons to fly the correspondents' copy back from Elba to Bastia for forwarding by radio to the outside world. And, for complete safety, such copy had to be pre-censored on Elba for fear that some Nazified falcon, trained like a retriever, might waylay the Quigley pigeons and steal their secrets. All damn' silly it sounded to me. And damn' silly it turned out to be.

That fixed, I was feeling grubby and weary after a heavy day. Now to find some accommodation. I climbed down a couple of flights to seek the secretary to the local naval boss, and ask where I might sleep and eat. I did not feel particularly in the mood to see the senior naval officer himself, for I had heard about him. He was a four-ring captain with a habit of blasting any junior officer who came over his horizon, but generally finishing by inviting his target to dinner.

Secretary was departed for the night, but I poked my head into the Big Man's office and there he was, and seemingly in good form.

"Who the hell are you?" he asked, in the tone of which I had been warned.

"Blore, sir."

"Jeesus ——!!!"

"No—Blore, sir."

That seemed to stop him a bit. He changed to a grin, and answered my questions about accommodation. He had been expecting me. I would find a bunk in the Naval Mess established in the Villa of Mimosas just down the road, and everybody ate at the large American-run Mess which occupied the ground floor of the Officers' Club just across the road.

Bastia was crowded for the great occasion, and accommodation at the Villa of Mimosas (or was it Lilacs) was rather primitive. A stretcher bed with mosquito-net, two in a tiny room, was the sleeping accommodation, with one bathroom to about thirty officers, and a water shortage. But the local lads had a reasonably comfortable wardroom, opening on to a balcony which overlooked the anchorage, and they had a good stock of liquor, both decent local French and some gin, whisky and beer with which they were being most delightfully generous towards visiting members.

A few drinks put new life into the weary frame, and it was with a sense of well-being at arrangements completed that I turned in to sleep to the lullaby of the man-eating mosquitoes of Corsica.

But in the morning a further shock awaited me. I had just arrived at the Press relations room to see my fellow-censors when the trouble broke. I had planned on a nice restful day, visiting the harbour to see old friends and speed them on their way. In a moment this idea was shattered. Suddenly a new squad of war correspondents came sweeping into the room. This "invasion" was headed by General Tupper, of the United States Army, who was the big boss of public relations for the Mediterranean theatre of war. He was supported by Major Frank Pellegrin and Captain "Groucho" Klein, two of his star officers, and a lieutenant and a private to complete his staff.

It appeared that, at the last minute, he had decided to fly another bunch of war correspondents from Algiers to Bastia to climb in on Operation Brassard. The powers-that-be in Algiers had cancelled the paratroops originally ordered for the Elba assault, and substituted a further bunch of war correspondents.

Among the new arrivals was an old friend, Maurice Fagence, just arrived out from England where he had been on the great Normandy D day. He was working as war correspondent for the *Daily Herald*. With him were whimsical little Chet Morrison, of the National Broadcasting Corporation of America; burly Frank Coniff, of the International News Service; Joe Dynan, another Associated Press man; and Sergeant Len Smith, of *Stars and Stripes*.

With the last batch of landing craft already embarking the French troops in the harbour, preparatory to hauling out into the anchorage to sail when night fell, it was my job to find berths for the new arrivals—and in a hurry.

I rushed them straight to the harbour. What a different sight it was from the day before. One great bustle. L.C.I.s lay bow to quay in a long line, with the black French troops streaming steadily up the gangways. Within 'an hour they would all be away. But Admiral

Troubridge's staff, like himself, were the most co-operative people I had met, particularly the chief of the shoreside organization, Commander Drake.

What craft were doing what? I did not want my party in the first assault wave. War correspondents needed to stay alive to be of any use. It was then that I discovered that an experiment was being tried on this operation. A number of the L.C.I.s were fitted to serve as hospital craft on the return voyage, with special staffs of doctors on board. They were to go in after the first assault and bring back the wounded. That should be fairly well up with the leaders and yet comparatively safe for the correspondents.

One by one I whizzed the new arrivals on board landing craft which were about to sail, and introduced them to the Commanding Officers or First Lieutenants. I left them sitting in little wardrooms tasting of the Navy's traditional hospitality which was still to the fore even amidst all this bustle.

Then, coming along the quay, I saw "Tackline". He was keen to play. Yes, I had two good correspondents left for him. We wandered down to the craft in which he had his headquarters as Flotilla Officer. "Tackline" was sparkling that morning. He smelt action. We had a few whiskies to start the show off well, and soon I was standing on the quay watching the last of the L.C.I.s haul out of the harbour. The big adventure was about to begin.

It was with an expressively grateful American General, echoed by his Major, that I drove back up the hill to A.F.H.Q. The Tupper party had brought along a welcome addition to the communications system, a wireless transmitter known as a 299 set, and Major Pellegrin had a most ingenious little machine, a wire recorder for taking radio broadcasting records by magnetic induction on a reel of thin wire.

The rest of the day was spent in making further arrangements to cope with the new influx of correspondents, deciding on wordage quotas to be sent over the 299 set and other small but important details.

When night came all was ready, but I had a horrible feeling of anti-climax. Before turning in I stood out on the villa balcony gazing out over the black sea. In the gardens below me the fireflies danced and winked. Out there in the blackness was an armada of landing craft steaming steadily towards its destiny. Two long streams of craft from Bastia and Porto Vecchio converging towards a rendezvous. Out there was my very good friend, P.J., sailing with the Army censor, Captain Barker, with whom he was to go ashore on Elba well up with the leaders. I was fed up with being marooned in Bastia. Not that I am the sort of mug who likes being shot at, but there is something wickedly fascinating about an invasion operation.

This was the biggest job ever done on their own by my friends of the landing craft, and they were quite delighted with the idea. It had to be done in this way. The approaches to Elba were guarded by a maze of dangerous shallows which were well mined and forbade the use of anything except shallow-draft ships. Tank landing ships and

China river gunboats were the biggest stuff that could be used for the job.

A bay in the middle of the southern coastline of the island, the Golfo di Campo, was to be the scene of the landing. There was supposed to be a suitable beach for the landing craft right at the head of this bay. The batteries guarding the approach to this bay were to be looked after by the French Commandos going in before H-hour. These commandos would then go on and clean up lesser batteries of eighty-eights and help to establish the beach-head. At other points in the island were heavy batteries which, Elba being so small, though plenty rugged, could throw shells right over the mountains to plug on the beach at Golfo di Campo. The Air Force was to look after these. It was only after the operation that I learned that air reconnaissance before the show had revealed these batteries taking practise shots to range on the southern beaches.

The infantry landing craft would go in and land the Senegalese, who should sweep the supposedly demoralized German garrison right back into the hills in one fell swoop. At the same time a group of British Naval Commandos were to carry out a pretty little sideshow.

Lying alongside a stone breakwater at the head of the Golfo di Campo were reported to be one or two German F-lighters, those heavily armed transport barges which the enemy used so much in these waters. The guns of the F-lighter or lighters would be able to sweep the landing beaches unless they were knocked out quickly.

The Naval Commandos were to deal with this menace. They were to go in in assault landing craft, make fast along the outer side of the stone mole, raise scaling ladders and swarm over the quay to take the German sailors by surprise. Revolvers, tommy-guns, koshes, daggers, and bayonets were to be the weapons for this close-quarters fighting. It was to be a real cutting-out job in the best Nelsonian style.

Just to add to the enemy confusion Lieutenant-Commander Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., of the United States Navy, was to create a "noises off" diversion right away on the other side of the island.

This American film star, whose charmingly unaffected personality had pleasantly surprised me when we met in Naples, had specialized in this tricky brand of warfare. It had first been tried with considerable success in the Desert Campaign where craft fitted with gramophone-like apparatus hitched to loud speakers sneaked in behind the enemy lines and created a diversion by playing recordings which simulated a landing.

The first the enemy would know was a helluva row as though ships were anchoring and starting to discharge troops. The recordings blared out the shouted orders of an invading force, suitably salted with cursing, blinding and unprintable comments by imaginary men who were supposed to be struggling ashore. Anchor chains would rattle, clankings and clangings would add to the general noise. Flashes would be set off, and the "noises off" craft would open fire with every gun they had.

This "noises off" invasion had proved effective in North Africa in

causing the enemy even to withdraw troops from the front line to meet the imaginary menace.

Now Douglas Fairbanks was repeating the performance for the benefit of the landing craft armada.

That was the shape of the operation as I saw it while I gazed out over the ink-black sea only a few hours before the "show" started.

At that time, of course, nobody knew that the enemy movements between Elba and the mainland, which had been observed by our reconnaissance aircraft over the past few days, were not the partial evacuation of the island which we supposed. On the contrary, these movements must have been German reinforcements crossing from the mainland to Elba in anticipation of just such an attack.

But confident in the belief that Operation Brassard was a push-over, I turned in to get a few hours' sleep before rush hour began for me.

## CHAPTER VII

### BUT THE HUN TURNED TOUGH

I SET myself to wake at H-hour. Not that I could do much about anything at that time, but by the time I got up to A.F.H.Q. (Allied Forces Headquarters) the first signals should be coming through. Perhaps there might even be a pigeon from Quigley.

Dawn was breaking as I climbed the stone stairs of the convent school and went along to the operations room. Yes, the signals were beginning to arrive. The French Commandos seemed to have done their job all right. There was not enough news to tell how the "show" was going. Seemed to be a bit confused.

I climbed another flight of stairs to the Press room. "Any pigeons yet?"—"Hell, no. Give the poor brutes a chance."

Now the sun was rising. More signals. The situation was becoming more confused. Did not look like a push-over now. What the hell could be happening. Anyhow my correspondents in the hospital landing craft should be fairly all right. Still no pigeons. The hours dragged by maddeningly. Time after time I went into the operations room and consulted the boards and the great maps. Nobody seemed to be at all sure what was happening over there in Elba. Only one thing seemed certain. The predicted push-over was not happening. Not yet.

One more visit to the naval operations centre. Lieutenant "Bud" Flanagan looked up and said: "The first craft back are just about entering the harbour."

I needed no second hint. I had warned the quayside officers that returning craft might be bringing Press dispatches, and they could

help me a lot by telephoning if any copy was handed in. But I must get down there in a hurry and try to discover what really was happening to my boys.

Into a jeep and down the hill. The first craft back were just making fast to the quay. I hurried on board.

"Any Press copy?"

"Any what?"

"Brought any messages back from the war correspondents over there?"

"What's it like across there?"

"All hell's apopping. Lousy."

"What about the push-over?"

"Push-over—nothing! It's tough. A couple of L.C.I.s have caught a packet. Have a drink?"

"No, thank you. I'm in a helluva hurry."

This was not so reassuring. Across to the next craft. Still no Press dispatches, but the same story to tell.

On board the third and last craft I found copy. Good old Reg Parker. The first back with the news. I glanced through the pages. Most of it had been written before landing, with a scribbled addition just after he hit the beach. He had waded out to a landing craft which was just leaving the beach and thrown his copy up for the return voyage.

Back into the jeep and up the hill. A spot of censoring, and the first news of Operation Brassard was going over the wireless to Algiers to be forwarded to London.

More signals had come in, but they had not clarified the position very much. The troops were certainly ashore, but they were meeting with much stiffer opposition than had been expected. Still no pigeons from Quigley.

More waiting. Then the telephone rang. It was the American Light Coastal Forces base down the harbour calling. A bunch of my people had fetched up there in a returning boat. Could I send them "transportation"?

So once more down the hill in the jeep. At the American base I was directed up the stairs to the Officers' Mess. I took them two at a time. And there in the dining-room I found them enjoying a belated lunch and some coffee. Jack Dodds and his photographic winger, Lieutenant Leslie Priest, from the Admiral's headquarters landing craft; Norman Fisher, with his newsreel camera; Joe Dynan; Captain Barker; and a strange scarecrowish figure—P.J.

P.J. was certainly in a pitiful mess. His hands and legs were swathed in bandages edged with a royal blue-coloured ointment or paint. His shorts and shirt and cap were pitted with hundreds of little holes—like cigarette burns.

"Good God, P.J.! What the hell have you done to yourself?"

"Done to myself?" he grinned back. "You don't think I did this to myself, do you? It was one of those blasted smoke-laying craft."

Over a final cup of coffee, P.J. told me the first story of the Elba landing.

"They must have known we were coming. They just laid for us," he said. "And if anyone said the batteries were knocked out first, they're liars.

"It's a bit like sailing into a Norwegian fjord. Hills on either hand. They didn't fire a shot until we got right inside and touched down. Then they let us have it good and proper. Mortars, eighty-eights and lots of other muck. I've never been so seared in all my life. And just to make everything nice and cheerful, the beach to which we were sent was a false one. We grounded up on a sand bar, and then found there was still a deep channel of water between us and the beach proper."

Apparently the hospital L.C.I.s were not the safe proposition on which I had counted. At least one of them was among the first three to touch down on the false beach and draw the blast of fire from the German guns and mortars dug into the face of the overshadowing cliff. Within the first couple of minutes they were getting a terrific pasting.

Three mortar shells scored direct hits on P.J.'s craft, one of them that nastiest of all projectiles—a mortar shell filled with white phosphorus. Immediately the whole for'ard section of the landing craft was a shambles. One shell penetrated the No. 2 troop space, wiping out a bunch of Senegalese troops below there. The others fell on the for'ard deck, causing heavy casualties and damage. Senegalese soldiers smothered in white phosphorus were tearing around the deck screaming. Nothing could be done for them, but something had to be done for the ship and the others in it. Some of the Senegalese had their own mortar bombs strapped on their backs. Disaster threatened. All that could be done was to push these black soldiers into the water and leave them to their fate.

Still trying to get ashore to set up a censorship post for the luckier correspondents who had gone to better landing points, P.J. and Barker had transferred to a small assault landing craft. They were heading for the beach when one of the smoke-laying craft with the big propellor aft sprayed them with the acid which makes the smoke.

P.J. got the full burst of the acid. Luckily he instinctively raised his hands to save his eyes. So, in considerable pain, he was taken out to the headquarters landing craft for medical treatment and sent straight back to Bastia with the others. It was not a really serious injury, but it certainly was painful. The acid had even burned through his clothing to his skin, and he will bear the pock-mark scars for some years to come.

Before he left the beach-head P.J. had seen that the L.C.I. which had gone in beside his was in flames and abandoned. What number, I asked. He told me. It was the one in which I had embarked Frank Conniff and Lucas. It started to look as though I were going to lose a few of my little party. P.J. was gloomy about the prospects. He thought that others might well have bought a packet.

A day later, when I had determined that only one of the Press gang had been wounded, and that not too seriously, it was all very well to



laugh and say that I had conjured up a vision of a headline in the *New York Editor and Publisher* saying: "Butcher Blore Slays Scribes." But right then I was plenty worried.

The rest of that day was pretty much of a nightmare. Still no pigeons. What was happening to Quigley and the few who had managed to get ashore? But other correspondents began to dribble back, telephoning for transport, clamouring for typewriters and censorship. They were pouring out thousands of words of copy for censorship and dispatch. I was going flat out on a multiplicity of duties. Getting the latest "dope" from the operations room, arranging accommodation and food for the boys, censoring. The Army had a regular team of P.R.O.s and censors. I had to be a one-man band for the Navy.

It was towards the middle of the afternoon that I looked up from my censorship desk and saw one of my "dead" men walk in. Never was I more astonished or delighted to see a man. It was Lucas of the *London Daily Express*, a dark, medium-built man who spoke quietly like a conspirator.

"Lucas, by God! You don't know how glad I am to see you. I was just about giving you up for lost," I said jubilantly.

"There've been several times in the last few hours when I gave myself up for lost. And me a grandfather," he said.

"Where's Frank Conniff?"

"That's the trouble. I'm afraid he's gone. I didn't see him after the shell hit the bridge."

"Tell me about it."

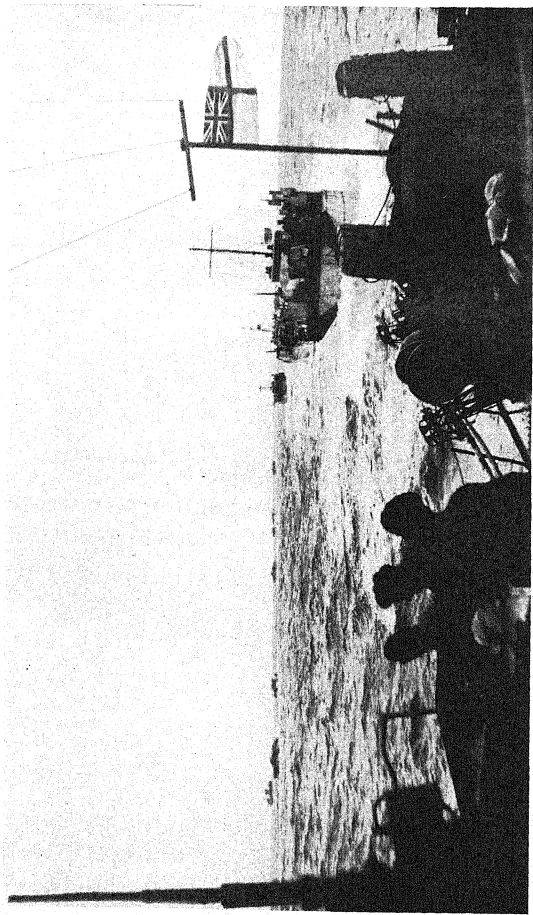
This was the story of the first beaching which P.J. had told me about. It was as close a view of war as any man had had and lived to tell.

The hospital landing craft in which Lucas and Conniff had sailed from Bastia had been the main target for the concentrated enemy fire as soon as it touched the false beach. Soon the craft was on fire and burning fiercely. Lucas and Conniff were up on the bridge with the First Lieutenant. The young Commanding Officer had gone aft to try to help his engine-room crew. The ship's communication system was knocked out.

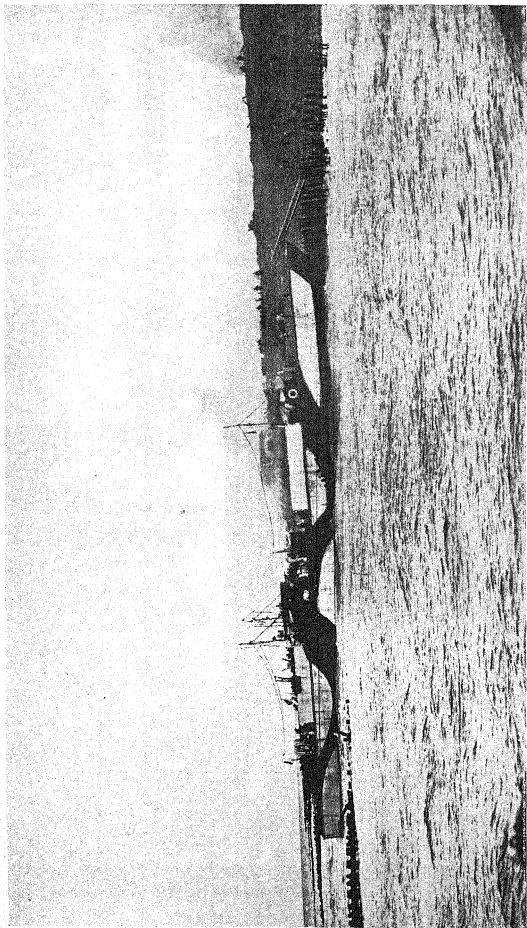
Then another shell burst, right at the foot of the bridge. Lucas saw the First Lieutenant fall dead beside him. At the same time Conniff just disappeared.

The doctor who was sailing in this landing craft came tearing up to the bridge to try to help. With the aid of the coxswain the doctor tried to get the ship off the false beach and out to safety in the bay. But this was not possible. The engine-room, the steering system and the communications were all wrecked. So, as the only surviving officer, the doctor gave the order to abandon ship. Nothing else could be done.

Lucas clambered down the ladders from the bridge, and walked aft to get over the side. The Germans were still firing heavily on the burning craft. Aft, outside the entrance to the galley, he stumbled



D DAY: Small Landing Craft (Infantry) carrying the assault troops to Normandy. Picture taken from L.C.I.(S) 519.



PERFECT BEACHING: Royal Marines landing on Walcheren Island, Holland, from Small Landing Craft (Infantry).

over two bodies. He stooped to examine them. They were the Commanding Officer with his hands under the arms of an engine-room rating. Obviously the young officer had managed to get his wounded hand up out of the engine-room and was dragging him into the shelter of the galley when both were killed.

It was with a sad heart that Lucas dropped over the side into the sea. As he told me, he and Frank Conniff had felt such a close friendship develop between them and the two dead officers in the few hours they shared before the assault.

But when Lucas came to describe his own subsequent adventures, he switched to the whimsical note to hide his emotion.

"When I was in the water," he went on, "I decided to swim seawards. The beach didn't seem healthy. I had gone quite a way out, paddling along in my lifebelt, when one of those small assault landing craft bore down on me. Standing at the bow was a youngster with a flaming red beard. He was dressed only in a short pair of underpants. Despite the underpants he looked like a boy Viking.

"I breathed a hefty sigh as they hauled me inboard. Then I discovered my mistake. These were some of the survivors of the cutting-out party, going in again to the stone breakwater to see if they could find any of their comrades wounded now that it was light.

"Here I had gone to all the trouble of getting out of that damned inferno inshore, and they were taking me right back into it. I took a very dim view of that. I could not help admiring the courage of these youngsters, but I had had enough of the fun and games along that beach. But there was nothing to do but sit tight, and hope for the best.

"If I'd only known what they were doing, I would have swum the other way as fast as I could go. But they brought me out safely again, and that's what matters."

We sat silent for a moment as he finished. Then his smile faded. "Yes, I'm afraid we've got to write poor Frank Conniff off."

Ah well—it was tough. We both liked Frank Conniff. But now there was work to do. Lucas hoed into his dispatch to the *Express*, passing it to me sheet by sheet for censorship and transmission. It was a delicately written and amusing account of a nasty experience, and I was glad to learn some time later that the *Express* had given it a good run. His was one of the few stories which got any show in the English Press which was, at that time, mighty preoccupied with the Second Front in Normandy and had little space to spare for sideshows, however spectacular for those taking part.

I was just about finishing up my office duties and getting ready to go down the harbour to seek further news from returning landing craft when the unexpected happened. I almost said miracle. But that is making it a bit too strong.

Through the door came the most woeful figure I had seen for many a day. But what a welcome sight. Frank Conniff. His uniform was torn, water-stained, rumpled. He dragged his feet in sheer weariness

to the point of exhaustion. His face was drawn and haggard, unshaven.

He managed to summon up a grin as he greeted me. "Hullo, Digger." I hurried to get him a chair, and he slumped down into it.

"Frank, old boy. You don't know how glad I am to see you. Lucas and I had just decided that you were gone—written off."

I tried to persuade him to rest a while, but he had only one thought in his exhausted mind. To get his story away to New York. He sat at a typewriter. I have never seen a man write a story like that, and what a story. But I will let it speak for itself. At the time I rated it a Pulitzer Prize winner, and asked Frank if I could reproduce it. He tore that story out of his brain, word by word, almost falling asleep over the machine as he struggled on. I carefully kept a copy, and here it is. Judge for yourself. All I have done is to translate it from cablese by inserting the "ands", "buts", "as" and "thes", and expanding certain contractions.

"Press—Internews New York—Via Mackay Radio to New York.

"11170 from Conniff. Dateline Elba:

"I hit the beach the hard way at Elba this morning. I got there by swimming three miles through a shell-raked harbour after German mortars had blasted our L.C.I. boat out from under me.

"Then, a huddled lump of humanity, I stretched prone on the water's edge for four hours, while Nazi and Allied guns duelled for superiority all around me.

"Projected against the vast backdrop of the Second Front, Elba may seem like a fragmentary operation. But to those of us who lived through it, Elba yesterday was the biggest show on earth. It was the last quarter of every tight football game ever played; the clutch in the closest World Series. A British officer who served four years in the First World War said that nothing on the Somme matched in concentrated fury the battle's early phases.

"My ship got it almost at the outset. We had watched the awesome chromatics of the opening exchanges—the white, red and green of Very lights, the flashing tracer bullets—and it was all very beautiful.

"Suddenly the ship seemed to groan. In a few seconds there was the keening wail of the wounded, jangled with barking guns to form a tortuous cacophony. The order was swiftly given to abandon ship.

"I snapped on a lifebelt and plunged overboard into the worst hell I'll ever know in this life.

"Machine-gun fire hissed past me, and seemed to pick off men in lifebelts like flies. Bigger guns combed the water into a million pleats. The concussions were so close and so severe that several times they spun me around in the water.

"I despaired. I started to pray. I am a Catholic, and I humbly said an Act of Contrition. I was surprisingly calm.

"Two hours passed with the battle raging all around. I swam towards another craft, when that too was hit and burst into flames.

Then, after dawn had broken, I discovered that I had floated and swum close to the shore. I summoned up enough strength to stroke the intervening yards.

"But my ordeal was just beginning. A sniper's bullet pinged past me, and I suddenly discovered that I had landed directly in front of a brick bungalow which the Germans were using for a machine-gun nest and observation post.

"They let me have it—but good.

"And there I was apparently all alone. The one-man beach-head, I said to myself. The big Jerry guns continued to plaster the waterfront. I noticed a burning ship drifting aimlessly a few hundred yards offshore.

"Then I saw a head bobbing in the waves, and I welcomed the first visitor to my beach-head—a Senegalese soldier who had also been blown into the sea by the Nazis.

"We huddled together in mutual misery while machine-gun bullets drilled overhead. Then he did something that moved me deeply.

"From seaweed strewn about us he fashioned two rude crosses. He handed one to me, and kissed his own, motioning for me to do the same. Even on our beach-head we had our religion.

"A big shell cracked ominously close, and a splinter spattered into the back of my comrade. Blood started to stain the cloth of his uniform. He was grievously wounded, but we were powerless to do anything about it.

"He just lay there and let it bleed. He never whined. Not by a whimper did he disclose his agony. I gave silent thanks that I was still intact.

"Hour after hour it went on. I tell you that I simply cannot describe how you feel as the shells bounce so close that every explosion jars you in the sand.

"But help was on the way. Squads of razor-keen French troops were slowly cleaning out the gun emplacements, pillboxes and machine-gun strongpoints.

"We could hardly believe it when they started to go to work on that brick bungalow whose occupants had been needling us for hours in sheer malice.

"They blew them out of there in a matter of minutes. All of a sudden I realized that I was safe. I almost collapsed. Seven hours of shelling can leave you limp.

"But my travail was not yet done. From craft burning offshore a soldier had swum into the beach. He made me understand the situation aboard with fervid gestures. Five wounded comrades were still on the vessel. Shot in the arms and legs, they were unable to swim to safety. Would I go back and rescue them?

"It was too much to ask. I was mentally and physically unable to operate. As the English say, I had 'had it'. I told him that I could do nothing.

"But a big, rangy Senegalese made up my mind for me. He quickly

stripped and started for the craft, which was now rocked by explosions. I had to follow him. We swam out to the vessel.

"It was a terrifying scene. Flames spurted from the sides of the craft, and explosions followed one after another. Five wounded sat in bandages at the after end, which was still untouched by flames. They were crying piteously.

"I was never so frightened, not even in the water before dawn. It seemed ironic that the worst danger should loom up after I was apparently safe.

"Somehow we got them off there. Three slid into the water. Absolutely unable to swim they had abandoned hope. One clutched me so tightly that I thought we would both drown.

"We left two for a second trip. I'll never know if I would have had enough courage to go back again to that burning hellship. A young English soldier had seen our struggle, and started for us in a life raft.

"He took off the last two in the midst of terrible explosions. He smiled as gaily as if he were coming from a cricket match instead of a doomed vessel.

"We carried the five wounded to a first-aid station established in a nearby village, Marina San Campo. Even there the Jerries kept plastering us. He had chosen his gun positions with beautiful taste. I jumped into a ditch along with several score of captured Nazis. And there I really relaxed. I fell sound asleep in the dead centre of some vicious bombing.

"When I finally found Press headquarters, the other reporters looked at me as if I were Lazarus. I had been reported missing and presumably dead."

"You should have stayed dead, Frank," said Chan Sedgwick of the *New York Times*. "We said some nice things about you."

"And Lazarus laughed, for it was sweet to be alive."

I did not put a stroke of the censorship pencil to that story. That, to me, was one man's Elba, one man's war in stark reality. I rushed the manuscript to the wireless room, and then set to help Frank. His first need was a towel, soap and a bathroom. He also borrowed my razor. He came back looking a new person. The next order was for a few drinks. Over to the Officers' Club to get the necessary. There Frank was once more hailed as "Lazarus arisen from the dead". And at last I found him a bed, where he dropped like a log to sleep for fifteen hours.

Now I had to get off to the harbour again. There was an unconfirmed report that one of the Press gang really had been wounded. This was young Steve Barber, the cheerful, boyish, peacetime commercial artist with the artistic shock of fair hair. It was rumoured, and later proved to be true, that he had been knocked out by a mortar shell a few minutes after reaching the beach.

Down at the harbour that night, I hunted from craft to craft among the stretcher-bearers who were carrying the wounded Senegalese soldiers ashore to deliver them into the hands of French doctors and nurses at

the quayside clearing station. There seemed to be a large number of wounded. But still no trace of Steve. I found one landing-craft officer who had seen a war correspondent being carried on a stretcher towards a landing craft to be brought back to Bastia. He guessed he was a correspondent from the fact that he had a typewriter perched on his chest.

This officer gave me a vague description which seemed like Steve, and he added reassuringly that as he passed the stretcher, the wounded lad had smiled cheerfully and waved to him.

It was Steve all right, though I found him only the next day, sitting up in bed, smiling broadly and seemingly proud of his wounded leg and foot which had been punctured in several places by mortar splinters. He had managed to get a message through to his team-mate, Joe Dynan, to whom he had dictated a story which brought congratulatory cables from his head office in New York. Had he been an American he would have got at least a Purple Heart for the occasion, but he was only an Englishman working for an American outfit.

There was also a move on foot among the correspondents to get Len Smith, the stocky sergeant from *Stars and Stripes*, recommended for the Legion of Honour for the dangerous job he did in helping French wounded to safety.

Never had so many war correspondents been crammed into such a small sector of fighting space as at Elba, and I doubt if correspondents have ever been so much in the thick of the fighting, the real front-line spearhead of assault. Yet not one of them blamed me for the hair-raising experience. In retrospect they enjoyed it. And they certainly won the admiration of the landing-craft lads with whom they had sailed.

I found this out as I made the rounds in the harbour the next morning. The landing-craft officers were chewing the "party" over at noon to the accompaniment of treasured gin and Scotch.

Most of them agreed that, for a beginning at any rate, it was tougher than either Salerno or Anzio for the L.C.I.s, though the L.C.T.s had an easier ride than on the previous occasions.

As Reg Parker had suggested in one of his dispatches, "Tackline" had been the hero of the desperate occasion. Seeing the first few of his craft being hopelessly hammered on the false beach, he had switched the immediate plan of his flotilla and led the rest to beach on a tiny, shingly cove which he had noticed as they were steaming in to the designated landing place. Thus he was able to land a large body of troops at a good strategic point without loss of life, either to his ships' companies or the passengers.

I went around to see him about the show, and get his comments. The picture was now starting to take shape in my mind. The toughest part of the Navy's work was now over, and the landing craft had switched to a ferry service of supplies and reinforcements.

The battle was still raging, but the French had a firm grip on a large part of the island and had already loosed the Goums into the rugged hills to chase the German general. For once, they did not catch him.



"Tackline's" comments on the previous morning's work were interesting. Like most of the other landing-craft officers he believed that the German Intelligence Service had got wind of just when and where the landing was to be made.

"They let us get right inside that damned death-trap, and then they let us have it," he said. "For them it was like shooting down at apples in a tub.

"From what happened to the first craft in, I could see it was asking for disaster to take the rest to that beach. I remembered a shingly cove protected by a hill and rocks which I had noticed on the way in, so we made for that. It was a pretty tight squeeze, but my lads tucked themselves in with only inches to spare between them, and yet there was not any kind of a collision.

"The French officer in command of the troops I was carrying kept pointing towards the other beach where all hell was popping, and shouting at me, 'I must go to my comrades. Take me to the other beach.'

"But we carried on and beached in the cove. I told the silly devil it would be mere massacre to go to the other beach, and pointed out to him that if he led his men over the hill which protected our craft from the enemy fire, and took the Boche in the rear, he could do a damn' sight more for his comrades than by going to a massacre on the appointed beach. At last he saw reason, and all my lads turned to in giving his troops a hand ashore with their gear and ammo. It turned out fine, but it was one of the hottest damned spots I've ever been in."

"Tackline" was highly impressed by the enemy mine-sowing. He said that there was a veritable network of small mines floating not far below the surface on the way in. Time after time he held his breath about them. It certainly was surprising that we only lost one landing craft on these mines which formed a submarine spider-web.

"Pat", who had come back in his L.C.T. for another cargo for Elba, was particularly loud in his praise for the L.C.G.s, those tank landing craft converted into floating gun platforms for bombardment purposes. A couple of these landing craft—Guns had carried out a most skilful duel with German batteries at the south-east corner of Elba.

He described this David and Goliath battle. The German batteries had a good line of fire to the landing beaches and could play havoc with the shipping there. They had to be distracted, even if they could not be silenced for the time being. So the L.C.G.s took on this task.

They could not really hope to knock out the well-protected German batteries with their four-inch guns. So they played tip and run with the Germans. They closed in to a range which was distinctly dangerous for them, throwing brick after brick at the German gun positions. The Germans could not ignore these targets. They stopped shelling the beaches, and trained round on the L.C.G.s. As the German guns began to get the range and throw up spouts of water dangerously close, the L.C.G.s dodged and drew farther out, but still attracting the enemy fire and answering it.

As soon as the Germans showed signs of switching back to their beach targets, the L.C.G.s closed in again to draw fire and have another crack at the Hun. They kept this game of dangerous "tiggy-touchwood" up for hours until the French troops could get through and start to deal with these batteries. It was a pretty job of work, and the L.C.G.s got away unscathed, as they well deserved.

As to the Nelsonian cutting-out party which had tackled the F-lighter in the little harbour, they had done a magnificent job. I saw their Commanding Officer back in Bastia. He was feeling terribly gloomy, for while his men, all mere youngsters like himself, had done a terrific job, they had had to pay rather heavily for it.

They had got in alongside the stone breakwater all right, and gone storming over it, yelling and cheering. They had quickly closed the astonished and horrified enemy, giving him "the treatment". In no time they were in possession of the F-lighter and busy demolishing and firing the dangerous craft. While they were still at grips with the enemy, the Huns ashore turned their guns on the F-lighter, trying to wipe out their comrades and the Naval Commandos alike. So far luck had been with the Commandos, and they had suffered but few casualties. But, with the job well completed, they began to swarm back across the breakwater. This had been mined by the Germans, and as they had now recovered from their surprise at the daring attack, they blew the mines just when the main body of Naval Commandos were getting back across it. The result was grim. Some of the finest bunch of youngsters in the Royal Navy, hardy, intelligent and daring, died on that obscure little breakwater.

Those were some of the many facets of Operation Brassard, but the best over-all picture was supplied by Lieutenant Jack Dodds, who had been my officer in Admiral Troubridge's headquarters landing craft. I had had him flown back to Rome as fast as possible to do a broadcast for the B.B.C. and write an article for the Services newspaper *Union Jack*. I did not have time to hear his full story in Bastia, but I was well impressed by the article he wrote from his experience.

"We knew that we were practically going to dead-heat with the Army in their northern advance (on the mainland), and we also knew that, with luck, we should cut off any plans the enemy had for evacuation," he wrote in part. "It was to win time for this evacuation that they defended this strongpoint so stubbornly. . . .

"A combined operation never goes according to plan," we had been told by the Admiral commanding the operation, Rear-Admiral Thomas Troubridge, whose great-grandfather, with Nelson at Trafalgar, had a big hand in sending Napoleon on his way to exile on this very Island, and who himself has commanded the landings at Oran, Syracuse and Anzio.

"He was quite right. This operation did not go according to plan, though it came off successfully in the end.

"Minesweepers are always the beginning, and often the middle and end, of all such operations. We knew before starting that mines

would probably be the biggest danger of all. The waters were stiff with them. Seven were pulled up by one flotilla alone in sweeping the initial channel through. Yet, thanks mainly to three units of the Fleet, only one medium-sized landing craft was lost of the many vessels engaged."

This was a surprising fact, for we even got Frank Conniff's L.C.I. back to Naples as a burned-out hulk which could be cannibalized for repairs to other landing craft. Other heavily damaged landing craft were also brought back safely in the end.

"Later in the day," continued Jack Dodds, writing about the sweepers, "it was a sight to make any sailor proud to see them sweeping steadily and methodically right under the enemy cliffs, with his shell bursts falling around them. They never wavered a cable's length from station. . . .

"On our way over the leading ships of every group wore at their mainmast the French Tricolour as well as the White Ensign or the Stars and Stripes.

(There were a few American ships in this operation, though the Armada was predominantly British.)

"It was a happy and, I believe, a spontaneous gesture, for this was in every way a smooth and harmonious combined operation of THREE Allies. It went like a well-oiled machine. I won't try to tell you what the language difficulty meant to communications. But out of what appeared to be Babel in a congested ship's office under fire, came common sense and action.

"The Bataillon de Choc had the privilege of dealing the first blow, and well they did it, though it was mainly diversionary. Vast clusters of chandelier flares inland, lighting up the island like a giant set-piece, gave evidence of the excitement these diversions caused. To loosen things up still more, in went the Groupe de Commandos.

"Then, at last, after the anxious hours of waiting, in went the main assault first wave. I had seen some of these troops earlier in training—great ebony Negroes from Senegal, most of them, and wiry Goums from Morocco with their strange desert uniforms. Under a hail of mortar and machine-gun fire they got in and pressed forward clearing the first beaches. But when, with dawn breaking over Italy, the next wave went in, the defence proved their cunning. As soon as our L.C.I.s touched the beaches they were met with a withering fire from 88 mm. guns kept carefully reserved for this purpose.

"Four of the L.C.I.s took heavy punishment, but not until they had landed at least part of their cargoes.

"This, then, was the main hold-up. With several thousand men ashore it was impossible to give them transport, armament and supplies till the cleverly concealed batteries in the hills had been mopped up by grim hand to hand fighting.

"In this winking-out process three of the Navy's oldest ladies played a fine part. These three gunboats are twenty-nine years old. They were built in 1915 for service in Mesopotamia, and most of their peacetime years were spent on the Yang-tse Kiang. They, and their modern

counterparts, fought several long duels with shore batteries who had got, far too accurately for comfort, the range of our convoys. It was an easy task for them, but one which they later regretted when they were being plastered and obliterated by naval guns, and also bombs from U.S. Thunderbolts. Low cloud throughout the day had made bombing and spotting impossible, and to our surprise not one single enemy 'plane was seen over the area throughout the day.

"The day was largely saved by that much-abused old campaigner, the Army mule. By trudging up the steep slopes to the hills they brought ammunition and supplies to troops who would otherwise never have got them in time.

"At last the furious fighting around the hills and the village ceased with abrupt suddenness. The Germans were retreating inland.

"The Admiral, in his little flagship, was the first to steam slowly round the small harbour, with the battered and shell-torn village of Marino di Campo still burning.

"Up against the mole was the smouldering, blackened hulk of a German F-lighter, victim of a stirring exploit of arms by British blue-jackets. Going in with the first main wave, this party of Naval Beach Commandos, about fifty of them, under the command of Lieutenant J. B. Lukin, R.N.V.R., armed with what the Admiral had previously described as 'grenades, tommy-guns, knobkerries and fists', settled in a few fierce minutes the account of a sizeable vessel that had already done severe damage to our craft, including a small M.L. which had gallantly engaged her to protect the assault craft she was leading in. His bravery cost the M.L. captain his life, and several of the cutting-out party did not return.

"And so, by deeds like these and dozens more of them, the little island, with so many memories of Napoleon, was being recaptured for the French, led by a young general whose reputation and promotion were won in the deserts of North Africa. The Navy, as usual, did their share, and to quote the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, Admiral Sir John Cunningham, 'When I speak of the Navy, I make no distinction between British and American.'"

Other snapshots of that big job by little ships which linger in my memory, include the high praise which I heard on all sides from the landing-craft boys of the steadiness of the Senegalese under fire.

P.J. was almost lyrical about this. Even when his landing craft was reduced to a shambles, the Senegalese did not panic. He noticed one old black soldier squatting on the deck puffing at a pipe without a blink while the lead was flying. When the first shell hit the landing craft, this old boy only shifted his position a few feet and went on puffing.

The white French officer in command of the troops in this particular landing craft also showed terrific courage. Early in the bombardment he had his right shoulder shattered by a fragment of shell.

His right arm dangled useless at his side. He transferred his revolver to the left hand. P.J. applied a rough dressing to the wound, and wanted the Frenchman to have it properly bandaged by the doctor before he went ashore. But the French officer, showing no pain, politely explained that he must be up ahead of his men. Last seen he was leading the Senegalese to the assault. The white French officers commanding colonial troops have a very high standard to maintain, and they certainly do so.

Another memory is of the often expressed surprise of the war correspondents at the high level of hospitality displayed by the officers of the little ships even in the midst of hectic last-minute preparations. Two American correspondents told me of their amusement over a hospitable incident which occurred on the way over.

After they had pulled out of the harbour and were waiting in the anchorage for sailing time, the Commanding Officer came down to the wardroom where the two correspondents were talking with the First Lieutenant.

"What'll you have?" was the C.O.'s invitation. "Some sherry?"

"Yes, thank you. That'd be swell."

"O perhaps some gin."

"Well, yes. We'd prefer that."

"Sorry we haven't got any Scotch. But, I tell you what—we've still got a bottle of something they gave us over in your country when we went there to commission this craft. We don't like it very much, and I'd almost forgotten about it. It's Bourbon."

Bourbon? The Americans could hardly believe their ears. The Commanding Officer went to the liquor locker, and brought out a dusty old bottle which he passed to the Americans for inspection. They handled it lovingly. They recognized it as an almost priceless specimen of fine old Bourbon liqueur whisky, a rarity even in its native land.

"Well, you'd better drink it up," said the Commanding Officer, "we're not keen on it."

And as one of the correspondents remarked on his return: "I'd go in the first wave of any invasion for another bottle of that stuff."

Some other correspondents and Major Pellegrin, whom I shipped over to Elba at a later stage of the show in "Pat's" L.C.T., came back quite lyrical about the hospitality. They had hardly expected to travel in liner-style in a rusty, ugly L.C.T., and had been a bit dubious about taking passage in such a craft.

But "Pat" put up such a show that they took a completely new view of these ugly ducklings. As they plugged slowly across a calm, sun-bathed sea, "Pat" got comfortable chairs out on deck, had a good *al fresco* lunch served there, and scared up some good liquor and plenty of cigarettes for the special occasion. This was going to war in the grand style.

That is the story of the landing craft *Trafalgar*. One by one the correspondents left Bastia for Algiers or Naples.

For a few days I lingered in Bastia to make sure that Steve Barber was going all right, and that everything was arranged for his return to Naples as soon as he was fit enough to travel.

During this time I went to see the chaps of the Light Coastal Forces, who, in motor torpedo-boats and motor gunboats, were playing such havoc with enemy coastal shipping right up into the Gulf of Genoa. I was looking for old friends of Augusta days, when these sea wasps were hunting the enemy in the narrows of the Straits of Messina. Commander Allen, who had been my host at Augusta, was here, steadily enhancing the very great reputation he had built up as one of the most brilliant strategists and fighters in this line of high-speed warfare. He gave me a fine welcome, and we talked of his adventures since we had last met.

Back in Naples I had seen signals about a new development in the work of the M.T.B.s and M.G.B.s. It was a new and highly successful experiment, the co-operation of L.C.G.s and motor gunboats and torpedo-boats in action. It was hard to imagine the plodding, awkward L.C.G.s teaming up with the swift, rangy sea greyhounds of Light Coastal Forces for combined attack on the enemy. But, thanks to the keen brain of Commander Allen, it had worked well.

The M.T.B.s and M.G.B.s, working in closest harmony with their American "oppos" of the patrol torpedo-boats, hunted down the enemy coastal convoys, and then up came the Landing Craft Guns and belted hell out of the astonished German F-lighters and sometimes escorting armed trawlers.

The first time this strange team of tortoise and hares went hunting, the enemy never knew what hit him. I knew this from the signals I had seen in Naples. The attack was made in shallow waters where the enemy never dreamed of meeting a craft with anything much bigger than an Oerlikon. The F-lighters, having considerably heavier armament than this to protect themselves and their precious supplies, felt moderately comfortable, even though they had been severely beaten up from time to time by the M.G.B.s and M.T.B.s.

But when the L.C.G. let loose at them for the first time, the Hun went to panic stations. With the heavier bricks falling on him, he was quite convinced that he was being bombed from the air. His guns were quickly trained up and cracking away at the imaginary aircraft. At the same time the boys of the Light Coastal Forces joined in the fun, and the enemy was then in utter confusion.

The new team left the field triumphantly, leaving the German convoy in sorry shape and still unaware of what had hit him.

Some weeks later came an even better show. The tortoise-and-hares team caught a fairly large enemy convoy heading towards the entrance to the channel between Elba and the mainland. Again the Hun was caught with his pants down. By the time the L.C.G.s and their swifter companions had finished with that convoy, about half a dozen F-lighters were at the bottom or burning like a Guy Fawkes night

bonfire, and M.G.B.s were chasing the escort ships northwards into the darkness. That was a busy night with a very pretty score.

But by this time it was established that the enemy had woken up to this new menace, and we were able to publish the stories of Operations Gun and Newt.

Postscript to Elba: Good Lord, I forgot to say thanks to those members of Admiral Troubridge's staff who gave me such great help in Bastia. Well, it is rather belated but here it is.

Like myself they had to stay behind in Bastia while the others sailed for Elba—and work like blazes in the little naval operations room. Chief of this hard-working party was Commander Drake, a cheerful, hospitable man who was never too busy to give every assistance.

One of his very helpful wingers was Lieutenant "Bud" Flanagan, R.N.V.R., whose unruffled serenity, and quips against the Press, disguised the fact that he covered a lot of ground in his complicated job. Transport and information—he was never too busy to provide them both for me. I reckon Lloyds Bank will be glad to get him back now that the war is over.

And Admiral Troubridge's Staff Officer, Intelligence, a major of the Royal Marines. Thank you also for your co-operation.

That is the point about a good Admiral. He always has a good staff, cheerful and co-operative. I found precisely the same with Admiral Fraser when he was Commander-in-Chief Home Fleet.

## CHAPTER VIII

### BACK TO THE TREADMILL

"So long, Pat. Cheerio, Tackline. See you back in Naples."

"Righto, Digger. Then we'll give you all the early low-down on landing craft for our book."

"Good."

And so I was on my way back from Bastia—back to the squalor of Naples to go on waiting for our own second front in the south of France. For some mysterious reason it seemed to be hanging fire. I had fully expected it to coincide, within a week or two at any rate, with the Normandy job. I thought of it as the southern half of a giant pincers. But here they had gone and started on Normandy before we had even left for Elba, and immediately after the fall of Rome.

Of course, it had been a terrific fillip to get up in Naples one morning and hear the news that the second front had been launched. But, in a

way, it was disappointing. To be out of the biggest show on earth, and pottering around in the Mediterranean was an anti-climax to all the work I had put into this job since I had been put ashore from escort work in the Atlantic, and appointed to the publicity job.

And the "southern pincer", as I thought of it, seemed far away still. After all, the landing craft which had taken part in the Elba operation would be needed for the bigger show along the Riviera. Yet these landing craft were busy and likely to be busy for some time on ferrying garrison troops and supplies between Corsica and Elba. Elba might be completely conquered, but there was still some weeks' work in clearing up and re-establishing normal life in the island.

So, out to the Bastia air-port to catch a Dakota back. I would stop off at Ajaccio and see Admiral Troubridge, to hear his postscript to Operation Brassard, and perhaps get his blessing for this book. By this time the *Royal Scotsman* had sailed back to Ajaccio.

From the air the rugged grandeur which is Corsica spread below me in a magnificent panorama as we winged southwards to Ajaccio. Although both Bastia and Ajaccio have a certain beauty, I much preferred the savagery of the Corsican hinterland. The towns were a rather pitiful sight. Nothing in the shop windows, and even a glass of poor wine costing a couple of shillings at the stiff exchange rate which operated against us. As to the average Corsican, he seemed to regard the British and American "liberators" with disdain and even distaste. At least, that was my experience. At Ajaccio I found this opinion confirmed by an old friend who was now the British Naval Liaison Officer there. He told me that he had been there for more than six months, and, despite a sociable temperament on his part, he had made no real social contact with the local people.

I formed the impression at that time that the French were still a sick nation politically, almost as politically ill as they were before the war.

The civilians, at any rate, seemed already wrapped up in the same old game of tricky party politics, snarling viciously at each other, double-crossing and bandying epithets such as "Fascist" and "traitor". This impression was considerably modified by my subsequent experiences in the invasion of southern France, whose people I could not praise enough.

But on the strength of my stay in North Africa and fleeting impressions of Corsica, I wrote home:

"Heavens knows how they will work out their destiny. I cannot help thinking that a firm dictatorship for a few years might help them to create the Fourth Republic on sounder lines." Of course, the French would probably like to lynch me for such a remark, and perhaps they are right. It is their own destiny after all—and a nation which has given so much to the world will surely find its path again.

But, to return to Ajaccio, which I remember as one of the most attractive little cities I have visited for outward appearance, I duly found the *Royal Scotsman* lying alongside the quay there, and renewed happy acquaintances.

I made my number to the Admiral, and asked him what he thought



of the idea of a book about the landing-craft lads—nothing heavy—just something to form a souvenir of their days in the Navy.

He approved the idea as I sketched it to him, and I then asked for his comments about Elba.

The Admiral was delighted with the show given by his landing-craft lads, but, as I expected, he was far from satisfied with the quality of intelligence reports he had received before the operation. I asked him about "Tackline's" part in the operation. He had heard of it, and told me that "Tackline" was being recommended for a decoration on the strength of it.

When I left the Admiral's cabin, I was swept into a party by my new-old friends of the staff. It was the birthday of one of the secretarial staff, Lieutenant Williams, and the bar supplies were holding out well for the occasion.

Eventually we transferred the party ashore—and finished up at a small official casino where I got my first lesson in the gentle art of "boule". Although it was no illegal dive, this casino was one of the most sinister-looking resorts I have seen, not only for its general layout and decorations, but for the swarthy clientele. With frequent rendezvous at the bar, we gathered at the tables with counters and had quite a good run for our money. At first I won a few pounds, but before the night was out I had lost a few shillings and had had some fun for it.

Next morning, as I was waiting for the car to take me out to the aerodrome to fly to Naples, Captain Quigley fetched up in Ajaccio—without his pigeons. I had almost forgotten the farce of the pigeons.

"Hullo, Quigley, how are your pigeons?" I greeted him.

He looked a bit sour.

"That was a mess," he said. "When the censors didn't arrive, I couldn't let them go."

"Well, you could have had a good squab pie, anyway," I suggested.

"We didn't need that. We lived like millionaires once the Krauts had gone. The locals brought us a sucking pig and good wine and other things. They gave us a terrific welcome."

"So I did miss something."

"You did. But Frank Pellegrin asked me to bring you a souvenir. I'll slip upstairs and get it."

He came down with a pair of German jackboots. I looked at them dubiously, and then decided that, after all, they would do as gardening boots back home.

"I hope they fit," said Quigley.

"How did you make a guess at my size?"

"Oh, I just looked around for a Kraut about your build, and took 'em.

"And," he added grimly, "he had no more use for them."

They did fit. Their origin did not worry me much. I stowed them quickly into my kitbag as the car arrived to run me out to the aerodrome.

Although Ajaccio was far from being a key aerodrome in the air transport network, it was just another example of the efficiency of the

Air Transport Command of the R.A.F. Some people think I've got a kink about the R.A.F. Transport Command. Perhaps so, but I've got enough sense of gratitude for favours received. And, at the risk of being tedious, I must repeat that the sheer cheerful courtesy any passenger receives from this body of men is something to be experienced to be believed. Why the British Government should plan a monopoly for some air transport company after the war, I cannot imagine. It would be a long way better if they just transformed Air Transport Command into a civil airline set-up. The lads of that Command would show anyone else in the world the true meaning of efficiency, courtesy and hospitality.

Which all leads up to the simple fact that I flew back from Ajaccio to Naples. High over the rugged Corsican mountains, a bird's-eye view of the northern part of Sardinia—and then winging it across the sea until, in the distance, Vesuvius reared its smoking cone high in the air. Past Capri, with its much over-rated Blue Grotto and its Americans. Turn left past Vesuvius and run in to land on one of the busiest aerodromes I have ever seen.

Back to dirty, squalid Naples and its frowsty gang of inhabitants. Thank heavens that the Egyptian gang had disappeared from our little mess by the time I arrived, and the flat was back to normal.

Now it was back to the donkey routine. Naples was definitely lonelier without the cheerful visits of "Tackline" and "Pat". Worst of all, there had been some sort of disturbance at the Swiss House, and this hostelry was temporarily closed.

I even tried to go to the San Carlo Opera, though for opera I have no taste. That effort did not get me far. One sight of the morning queue waiting for tickets was enough to choke me off. That was one of the surprising sights of Naples. Every morning there was a queue hundreds strong at the Opera House booking-office, officers and men of all the British Services waiting patiently for opera tickets.

Many a soldier and sailor who had never dreamed of going to anything more than a dance-hall became converts to really good music in Naples. The experts told me that they could not have done much better, as the standard of the San Carlo Company for singers, orchestra and *décor* was high even for Italy.

And, talking of entertainment, I am reminded of one of the most laughable stories I ever heard, told to me about that time by one of the landing-craft lads who landed in hospital for a short spell as a result of Elba.

The medical orderlies decided to give a concert for the benefit of the patients. They worked up a programme of songs, music and sketches, under the direction of one medical orderly who had been a keen student of amateur dramatics in civvy street. One of the sketches he wrote pivoted on the wearing of a medal ribbon by one of the characters.

The only medal ribbon available was that of the 1939-43 Star (as it was then called). This was too dull for stage purposes. So the lad who was to play this part toddled down the Via Roma to an Italian shop selling the local brand of medals and ribbons. The Italians have a

very pretty taste in wallpaper when it comes to medal ribbons. They lay it on with a trowel both as to colour and multiplicity. The young British medical orderly looked the stock over to find the gaudiest piece among a vivid rainbow display of ribbon. Without asking its significance he picked one really vicious piece. It looked rather like a sunset run mad.

Came the great night. The patients limped or were carried to the improvised theatre. Among the audience were a few Italians who were working in the hospital.

Everything went nicely until the sketch of the medal ribbon. As soon as the character with the gaudy ribbon stepped on the stage there was a burst of muffled laughter from the Italian group at the back of the room. This muffled laughter, which punctuated the sketch, nearly wrecked the show. The performers were boiling mad about it.

As soon as the show was over, the organizer grabbed hold of a couple of Italians and led them behind the stage. The lad who had worn the ribbon was almost dancing with rage.

"What the hell's the matter with you people?" he demanded of the still sniggering "Eyeties".

"Pardon, signor, pardon," they spluttered with the tears of laughter still in their eyes. "It's the ribbon."

They pointed at the piece of crazy sunset the medical orderly was still wearing.

"Well, what's the matter with it, eh? It's one of your own damned pieces of wallpaper anyway."

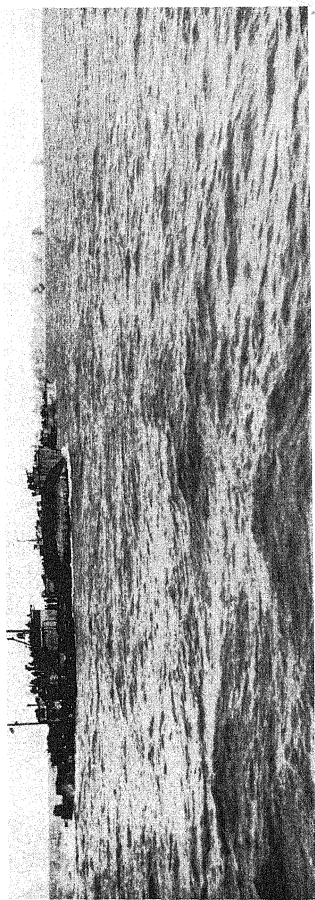
"Yes, yes, signor," coughed one Italian. "That's the funny part."

"What funny part?!!! Talk up and talk fast."

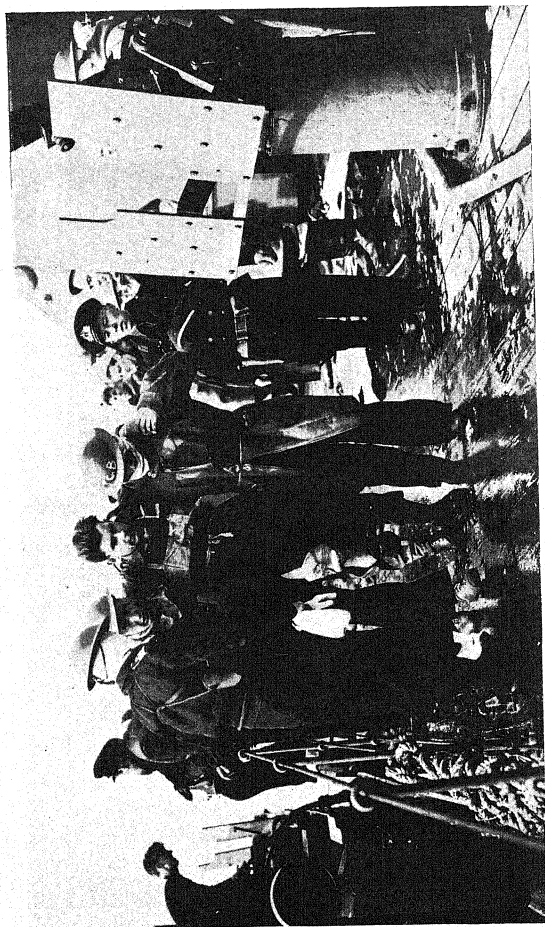
"Oh, signor. Oh, signor, it is the ribbon of the medal which Mussolini used to give each Italian mother upon the birth of her eighth child."

While I waited for the landing-craft boys to return from Elba, so that "Tackline" and "Pat" could start to give me the dope for our book, I made friends with a naval officer who had the job of British liaison officer in the fastest major warship in the world. This was the Italian cruiser, *Pompeo Magno*.

I had stood out very strongly against fraternization with the people I still regarded as a conquered enemy, and poor specimens even of that. But the lieutenant who was serving in the Italian cruiser persuaded me that I should come off with him to luncheon in that ship. He insisted that the Italian naval officer was a very different specimen from the average Italian. The Italian Navy, he insisted, had never been fully infected by the Fascists. The Italian naval officers prided themselves on maintaining their aristocratic professional status, looking down upon the strutting Fascist puppets and grafters. In a previous cruiser in which my friend had served as liaison officer, the Captain had been a titled Italian who had won international fame as a poet. That is the



ATTACK: Small Landing Craft (Infantry) race in with assault troops for the Battle of Walcheren Island.



OUT OF BATTLE: Midshipman from landing craft, after his first experience of action, watches as wounded are helped on board H.M.S. *Frobisher*.

way it goes in Italy. I can hardly imagine a British cruiser captain as a poet, except in the matter of lyrical language when something goes wrong on the fo'c'sle head when the ship is coming to anchor in the midst of the fleet.

I had noticed the *Pompeo Magno* lying out in the bay, and been very attracted by her beautiful lines. She was built for speed and looked it. Sleek, stream-lined and beautiful.

"Fastest cruiser afloat, but does she vibrate like hell," said the British liaison officer. "She's practically all aluminium from the deck up—barring the turrets, of course. Makes her pretty hot, too, in these waters."

So I allowed myself to be persuaded on board, and did not regret it. Curiosity got the better of my non-fraternization rule. I was glad that I went. Certainly, the Italian naval officer is the best of his race. He has charm and grace. And his profound admiration for and imitation of the British Navy is disarming. He ought to have such admiration, seeing what Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham did in the Mediterranean.

The tall Venetian who was navigator of the *Pompeo Magno* was well worth meeting, and I became very friendly, too, with the First Lieutenant, who thereafter was constantly sending messages ashore inviting me to lunch whenever the ship was in harbour. At that time this lovely ship was running a sort of ferry service between Naples and Sardinia, which was much the same as setting a Derby winner to pull a baker's cart.

As the liaison officer had said, the ship was very hot as she lay at anchor in Naples harbour, thanks to the aluminium bulkheads. She was also a bit on the grubby side. I do not suppose many nations in the world can equal the great cleanliness of a British warship, at least no Mediterranean nation.

I was never able to accept the subsequent invitations to luncheon in the Italian cruiser, for soon after my first visit things began to get busy again.

The first event was the visit of His Majesty the King to Italy towards the end of July.

Of course this was very much "top secret" until shortly before his arrival. I got just two days' warning to prepare for the event, and get the war correspondents lined up for the naval section of the tour. The Navy was putting on a show as only the Navy knows how for such an occasion, and to dovetail twenty or thirty war correspondents into the long tour at short notice was a piece of intricate planning. They had to be divided into three parties in such a way that they would all be satisfied with their view of the spectacular event. There were writers, broadcasters, ciné men and still photographers.

My orders were to lay the publicity on as heavy as possible. With a staff of two photographic officers and three Press officers this was not so easy, but, as usual, when the under-staffed Navy was in a jam, Captain Len Putnam, the local boss of the Army Film and Photographic Unit, came to the rescue with his larger band of cameramen.

After doing with a minimum of sleep for two days, the arrangements were ready on the night before His Majesty's arrival—even coping with

a couple of special correspondents, a B.B.C. man and a film man, who flew out specially from England with Jack Brebner, of the Ministry of Information. I had even made a dummy run over the course to time the tour, and make sure that nothing could go wrong with my set-up. It only needed one tiny incident with war correspondents or photographers getting in the way, and my name was mud with senior officers in this Command upon whose goodwill my work so much depended.

The morning dawned as beautiful as the Mediterranean knows how to make it, promising plenty of heat later in the day. The Press party, mostly down from Rome, gathered outside Navy House on the waterfront. We split into three and went our ways. I took charge of the American correspondents and photographers who were to follow the Royal Barge all around the anchorage, as the King inspected the cruisers, destroyers, frigates, corvettes and other warships of his Navy as well as the Americans and French. The first visit of the day was the most impressive of all. It was on the square outside the Fort del Ovo. This is a magnificent and historic castle rising high on a tiny island linked to the esplanade of Naples by a short causeway. The castle, which has a long history all of its own dating back to Roman days, is famed for its mediaeval bottle dungeon into which many a man of other days had been dropped to die.

Now the castle served as a naval barracks, and I sometimes wondered why they did not instal the dental surgery in the bottle dungeon.

This was the background for the first inspection by the King. In the courtyard below the castle were lined up senior officers, staff officers and Wren officers, the more senior of whom were introduced to His Majesty. This parade was a brave show with all officers in immaculate white "Number Tens", many of them brave with medal ribbons. The only blot on the landscape was Jack Brebner, who, in an ordinary civvy suit, followed the entourage everywhere as he was entitled.

In the adjacent little harbour lay the Royal Barge, with the standard ready to be broken out from the little masthead as the King finished his inspection at the Fort, and stepped into the barge for the tour of the anchorage. Just round a corner out of sight lay the King's escort for this tour, a British motor torpedo-boat and an American patrol-boat, the Yankee equivalent of the M.T.B.

On board the American boat I had all the American correspondents, while in the British boat were P.J., with Henry Buckley of Reuters, Godfrey Talbot of the B.B.C., Douglas Hardy of Paramount Newsreel, Captain Don McWhinnie of the Army newspaper *Union Jack*, and Captain Len Putnam. As the inspection was in progress these two boats slipped out of the tiny Fort del Ovo harbour and lay just outside.

Then the Royal Barge came sweeping out with the King standing at the salute as he passed between our two boats, and we were soon cracking along on either quarter of the barge. Out into the Bay of Naples, speeding along between the lines of anchored warships, while their ships' companies lined the rails and paid homage to the sailor King. Towards the end of the naval lines lay the hospital ships and,

beyond them, extending right into the main quays, were the merchant ships. His Majesty, with his famous thoughtfulness, seemed particularly keen on passing every possible merchant ship to see his less uniformed seamen. I understand that he personally made amendments to the sea route to ensure this.

At the other end of the harbour he landed to inspect one of the greatest triumphs scored by the Navy's little known Constructor Corps in restoring the much-wrecked Naples harbour to full working order. This was a big power-station which the Germans had left as a heap of ruins. When Army experts first inspected the debris they decided that nothing could be done about it. But the Royal Navy, with American assistance, had gone to work on the ruins, and now the King saw a completely rebuilt powerhouse, gleaming clean and with only one wrecked boiler, suspended between the first floor and the ground as a memento of the work of the Germans. It had been rebuilt from wreckage and bits and pieces, and the Constructor Corps Commander in charge of it was rightly proud of the work his men had done.

From there the King drove through the docks, inspecting the other work which the Constructors had done in restoring quays and dry-docks. This work is regarded as one of the major achievements of its kind in the whole war.

Next he came to the cruiser *Orion*, lying at the railway pier of Naples, where he was introduced to more senior officers, including General ("Jumbo") Maitland-Wilson.

After that he came back into the orbit of myself and the American correspondents, for his next call was on board the U.S.S. *Catoclin*, flagship of the American Admiral in command of all United States naval forces in those waters. Not having won any "gongs" for valour in this war, that was the closest view I have ever had of His Majesty as he brushed past me on his tour of inspection. I was so close that I could see the lines of weariness which marked his face. My thought at the time was of the terrible strain of being King, the unending task of royalty.

Always touring, inspecting, being interested, being gracious—no matter if you felt like dropping in your tracks.

The tour ended with another big parade on a large square outside the main naval barracks of Naples, where Royal Marines, barracks personnel, men of the Merchant Navy, a French contingent and an R.A.F. detachment were lined up for inspection in the now grilling sun.

One happy little incident marked this part of the tour. Tall, slummy Neapolitan tenements overlooked the parade ground. It was washing day, and the ragged laundry hung from every balcony, giving the neighbourhood a very scarecrow appearance. Of course the Neapolitan populace had not been told of the distinguished visitor in their midst.

Efforts were made soon before the arrival of the King to get these people to haul their washing in, and make the neighbourhood more presentable. They were obstinate. The poor Neapolitan housewives saw no reason to upset their age-old washing-day routine. Then the



magic word was whispered. By this time it was safe to tell. His Majesty the King of England was in their midst.

That was enough. In a twinkling the patched bloomers and ragged undervests were whisked from the balconies. In their place the inhabitants hung the gayest carpets and shawls which they could muster from among their poor possessions. And when the King came upon the scene, the tenements presented a gay sight, with Italians cheering and brava-ing from on high.

Another amusing incident also marked the King's visit to Italy.

He stayed for a night at the residence of Admiral Sir John Cunningham, Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean. This was the historic Villa Emma, scene of the idyll between Nelson and Lady Hamilton. This building is on the cliffs overlooking the Bay of Naples at its more fashionable end beyond Possilipo.

As long as the King stayed there, one of the M.L.s from Ischia was on patrol off the shore to shoo away Italian fishing-boats or other intruders from that part of the Bay.

As dawn was breaking on the overnight of the King's stay, the young New Zealand lieutenant (R.N.V.R.) commanding the sentry M.L. nearly had kittens as he looked towards the shore and saw a boat close under the Villa Emma.

He went tearing in to deal with this intruder. In the small boat he saw a middle-aged man rowing, and in the sternsheets a woman of about the same age fishing.

"Hullo, there," hailed the lieutenant, as soon as he got close enough. "You can't fish there. You must get out of here."

The two in the boat took little notice. The M.L. drew closer, until it was almost on top of the rowing-boat.

"Look here, madam," remonstrated the Commanding Officer once more. "You must get out of here at once. You can't fish here."

The woman looked up, and frowned. Then she spoke.

"I am the Queen of Italy."

Luckily the Commanding Officer was a perfect gentleman. A lesser gentleman would probably have retorted, "And I'm the Emperor of Ethiopia, so hop it."

At this juncture the Queen handed up her royally engraved visiting-card, and the New Zealand officer was duly convinced. Nevertheless, he explained to Her Majesty the Queen of Italy that orders were orders, and he must still ask her to withdraw. With a sigh of relief he saw the boat pull away and head for a landing point not far along.

The subsequent official report on the incident, which was forwarded with the royal visiting-card attached, was a masterpiece of quiet humour. The Commanding Officer, it was pointed out, might have been informed by someone that the Queen of Italy lived a few doors away from the Villa Emma and had the hobby of early morning fishing.

I understand that this whimsical report with the card attached was shown to our King at dinner in the evening, and he was so highly amused that he asked for the report and the card to take with him. When a

member of the Royal staff delicately suggested that the young New Zealand officer concerned might like to have the Queen of Italy's card back as a souvenir of a strange meeting, the King said that he would send the officer concerned a special souvenir in exchange.

That was the King's visit to his fighting men in Italy, an exhausting tour which was deeply appreciated by his subjects in khaki and blue.

Soon after his departure I was jerked out of the routine rut again by the official whisper that the job for which I had really come to the Mediterranean was now in sight. I was surprised to find that, on the land side, it was to be entirely a Franco-American operation. On the naval side it would be largely a combination of the British and American Fleets in the Mediterranean, with strong reinforcements, including battleships and aircraft carriers from both Britain and the United States, and a few major French warships.

On the British side there would be a good representative fleet of my friends of the landing craft, including both "Tackline" and "Pat".

The first thing, and that in a hurry, was to get a good idea of the number of correspondents to be catered for, particularly the British. The American Navy, through Lieutenant-Commander Charles Duffy, U.S.N., was supposed to be looking after the American journalists.

With the bulk of war correspondents in Rome, I had a good excuse for a rush visit to that city again. This time it should be a flight. A long afternoon's drive by road, but an hour's flight. That was when I saw Rome, ordinarily a city of glory, from its most beautiful aspect—from the air. Rome is an attractive city from a few thousand feet up, for the height softens even the stark and ghastly whiteness of the Victor Emmanuel Monument, and the dome of St. Peter's seems to gleam like a beacon from afar—a spiritual beacon. The Pontine marshes are also seen at their best from the air, a great agricultural plain which is the only real memorial of that great failure, Benito Mussolini.

War correspondents have keen noses, and I found them waiting for word from me about the job to come. Already the word of big things in the offing was spreading. I would say that the invasion of southern France was one of the worst kept secrets in the world.

A week before the great fleet sailed for the Riviera, every Italian wise guy seemed to know that the invasion of southern France was very imminent. The security was terrible. I even expressed the only slightly exaggerated belief that, if you wanted to know what was going to happen, you should ask a Neapolitan hairdresser or a Rome bar-tender. The only thing needed to complete the comedy was a special cheap edition of operational orders to be sold on local bookstalls.

That this is no exaggeration is proven by the story told me by General Delattre de Tassigny, the French Commander-in-Chief, at his headquarters in southern France a week after the landing. He laughed as he told me of it. A few important German prisoners had just been brought in by his men and interrogated.

They had been entirely surprised by the landing because it was

made at the points of which they had been warned by their intelligence officers.

These Germans had known the precise beaches and the approximate time of the invasion, but so precise and detailed was the information they had obtained that they could not believe it. They were convinced that the Allies had foisted this information upon them to force them into wrong dispositions. The Germans had therefore looked at their maps and decided that the main Allied landing would be made between Toulon and Marseilles, fanning out in each direction to envelop these two main ports.

As a result they had concentrated their land mining operations between Marseilles and Toulon.

So, with details of our plan in their possession well in advance, nobody was more surprised than the German Command when we landed with ease at the points where they had been told we were going to invade.

That is what General Delattre de Tassigny told me, and frankly I am not surprised. After all, before any big operation, part of the drill is to try to foist wrong intelligence information on the enemy to force him into the wrong dispositions. Perhaps in this case the Allied leaders thought that the truth would be more baffling than fiction on this one occasion, though I can hardly believe it. And, at the last minute, the Germans' mistaken conviction was reinforced by a variation of the "noises off" theme.

As I subsequently discovered the Air Force supplied the final distraction. Adapting the technique used off North Africa and in the Elba operation, aircraft flew over Marseilles, and outside the city they dropped parachutes carrying all sorts of devices to fool the enemy. There were once more amplified gramophone recordings to simulate the noises of an airborne force landing and assembling for action, accompanied by special sorts of firecrackers and other light-making and noise-making devices to suggest a fierce little action between paratroopers and defenders, all very noisy and confusing. All this helped to hammer home the Hun's refusal to accept the gift from heaven which his intelligence corps had provided thanks to the crazy lack of security on our side.

But to return to the preparations. When I returned to Naples with a list of prospective passengers for the big adventure, I found that the Bay was filling rapidly. Among the cruisers which had arrived was the *Black Prince*, flagship of the Admiral controlling the bunch of aircraft carriers for the operation. There were also two Canadian infantry landing ships, the H.M.C.S. *Prince David* and H.M.C.S. *Prince Charles*. And round towards Castellamare, in the shadow of Vesuvius, were gathering the greatest collection I had seen of those sea-elephants, the tank landing ships, nearly all of them American.

It was with some difficulty that Captain Dorling managed to prise sufficient details of the coming show out of the super-security-minded British naval staff. No shadow of suspicion of breach of security could ever lie against the British Navy.

But with time growing short we did get what we wanted: a full list of the ships taking part, with their point of departure and approximate time. Nevertheless, I believe that there were a lot of Italian citizens who really knew as much about the party as I did at the time I sailed.

I found that the invasion force, which was comparable with that detailed for the Normandy invasion, would sail from a number of far-scattered points to converge upon the Riviera beach-head. They were assembling at Naples, Malta, Palermo and Oran. The Admiralty had sent out, as reinforcements for my official party of Navy photographers and P.R.O.s, three extra official naval photographers and an official naval reporter. They were in the British escort carriers which had reached Malta from England, and showed a certain reluctance to come on to Naples for disposition, seeming to regard themselves as an independent unit devoted to the air side of this operation. However, that was soon settled.

My problem was to dispose the official party where it would be of the greatest use in assisting correspondents to see the invasion and then get their copy back all the way to Rome for transmission by wireless. As to the photographers and the war correspondents they must be spread out in such a way as to cover all facets of the operation from cruiser bombardment to assault landing, and yet be able to get back to points where their copy and pictures could be forwarded.

Naturally I was strongly inclined to get as many as possible with my friends of the landing craft, for these craft always provide a grandstand seat since they are so much to the fore in the initial stages. The minesweepers, an equally ticklish job as the first ships likely to come under enemy fire, are also good vantage points.

One landing craft, a British one, promised to provide an excellent chance for correspondents. It was an L.C.I. fitted up as a headquarters ship to accompany the flagship of one of the American Admirals engaged. It would stay close to his proper flagship in case that was sunk, in which event the Admiral would transfer his flag to the L.C.I. and carry on from that. Also the L.C.I. would serve as a ferry to the beach to take the American Admiral inshore whenever he wanted, and being so close to the real flagship, it would provide an opportunity for the correspondents to organize a ride back to Corsica with their copy and pictures in any craft from that sector which was returning soon after the initial assault.

An L.C.G. was also chosen for one correspondent as providing a grandstand seat.

At last all dispositions were made for correspondents, photographers, newsreel men, war artists and broadcasters. As to my own slim party of officers, I had to spread them out as a sort of courier and guide service for the correspondents between the beach-head and Naples and Rome. The Navy had a very thin team compared with the American Army, which was out to put itself on the map in very big letters and to hell with the Navy.

General Tupper was upset because the Navy had not found it possible

to turn on a special service of Italian MAS-boats or aircraft from the beach-head to Corsica, and decided to play his own hand full of trumps. He was sending to the beach-head for Army purposes an initial team of three censors and a couple of Press Relations Officers, both majors, with himself, a couple of colonels and lashings of majors and captains to follow.

The British and United States Navies in combination had one man to represent their interests on the beach-head both as field Press censor and Press Relations Officer—myself. I gave myself the job because I had that extra half stripe of a lieutenant-commander to give me a bit of weight against an Army team headed by a general.

P.J. was next in line, being stationed at the key transit point in Corsica, Ajaccio, with Lieutenant Laycock at another point in Corsica, Lieutenant Pisani in Naples, and Lieutenant Dodds in Rome. It was a very tenuous link over hundreds of miles.

My position was particularly weird: an Australian belonging to the British Navy as an R.N.V.R. officer with written orders from the United States Navy which was running the sea side of the invasion, and attached to the 45th Division of the United States Army for the landing. Just to complicate matters I transferred myself to the French Army for the thrust to Toulon, but more of that later.

The day of the main embarkation was a sheer nightmare. Issuing "blood chits" and sailing orders to correspondents, organizing motor transport and boats to get them to ships and landing craft all over Naples and the anchorage, and a hundred and one other duties of last-minute organization. By the time I had them all embarked, I was sweating blood. I had one hour left to complete my own arrangements, and get round to Castellamare to join an American tank landing ship which would land me at the right beach in good time to be ready to receive any correspondent, censor his copy and find some way of sending him or his story or pictures back to a dispatch point.

I had done my best to get with "Tackline" or "Pat" for the occasion. I knew that if I or some correspondents were with their flotillas, they would see that the copy got through. But it was no go. "Tackline" and "Pat" were going to a beach away to the right of the line, and the Army set-up was, obviously, to focus the Press services on the central landing beach.

Before I went racing off to join my L.S.T., I went down to draw a revolver from stores. I arrived to find that no such thing was available, but that they had got me a Sten gun. Fine. What about ammo?

"Oh, ammo, awfully sorry—we haven't got any. We've asked the Army for some."

I left that Sten gun under my bed in the Mess, and went off, as usual, without a gun. Anyway, I never liked firearms. They are too damned heavy and awkward to tote around. A naval forty-five is a miniature cannon which is calculated to give you hip disease.

What was better were the two bottles of Scotch I had managed to draw as a special ration. I certainly found that they were the best

invasion weapon in the world, both as a fortifier and for bribery, or internationally understood currency.

So, with luggage consisting of toilet gear, a change of shirt and underclothes, a duffle coat, two bottles of Scotch and an amazing box of American rations called "10 in 1", I reported on board the landing ship to go and look for a real war. In my pocket I carried the following order which was my ticket for the invasion:

#### UNITED STATES NAVAL FORCES

##### NORTH-WEST AFRICAN WATERS

From: *Commander Eighth Fleet.*

To: *Lieutenant-Commander T. V. Blore, R.N.V.R.*

1. You will report to the Commanding Officer, U.S.S. L.S.T. 1021 for temporary duty in accordance with verbal instructions.

2. Travel via first available Government transportation, including air, is hereby directed as being necessary in the execution of these orders.

(Signed) K. R. STEINMETZ.

By direction.

So now I was a member of the United States Navy for the time being.

I had always thought that the English were the masters of understatement. But Mr. Steinmetz—whoever he might be, though probably a Captain—had the English beaten.

"For temporary duty in accordance with verbal instructions." That meant that I was to lone wolf it on a major beach-head as the sole representative on land of both British and United States Navies in the field of activity which would spread to the world the whole picture of a great invasion.

But that night I was far too tired to bother whether I was going to an invasion or a pink tea party.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE SEA-ELEPHANTS

OLD Man Vesuvius never saw a stranger sight than lay before him in the waters off Castellamare on the eve of the southern France invasion.

Several score of these man-made sea-going elephants lay there at anchor, many with their massive, electrically operated bow doors open, and loading ramp partly lowered so that the fighting men could while away the hot hours of waiting with bathing. Each of these great, unwieldy sea monsters was packed with fighting men and vehicles of every variety—tanks, jeeps, trucks—crammed in the cavernous hold or on the broad expanse of deck seeming nearly the size of a football ground.

I was the last arrival on board L.S.T.1021. Major Frank Pellegrin was already installed, with Major "Groucho" Klein, whose striking resemblance to one of the Marx Brothers explained the name by which he was invariably known. With them were four broadcasters: Vaughn Thomas of the B.B.C., bright-eyed little Chester Morrison of the National Broadcasting Corporation of America, Eric Sevareid of the Columbia Broadcasting System, and Lieutenant Zimmerman.

With them they had an official wire recorder on which the four broadcasters would record their grandstand views of the invasion to be rushed to Rome and sent out to the listeners of the world.

Like most of the others in the Bay, L.S.T.1021 had metaphorically hoisted the "Full House—Standing Room Only" sign. All the comfortable cabins were filled. And that is where I scored. For I gladly accepted the suggestion that I should have a stretcher bed on a nice sheltered section of the boat-deck, and use the First Lieutenant's cabin for my gear and as a dressing-room. Although the cabins of an L.S.T. are level with the upper deck, and are quite comfortable, they are not really built for a Mediterranean climate. The constantly whirring electric fans seemed to do little more than stir the sticky air around, especially at night when the ship was blacked out. And it was the same in the now crowded wardroom, despite its spaciousness.

The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant R. W. Erickson, U.S.N., seemed a little upset at first that a lieutenant-commander of the British Navy, sailing as a passenger in his ship, should have to put up with such improvised quarters, but I finally persuaded him that I was more than satisfied with my airy night "cabin". The American Navy also goes in for the little extra comforts which make a lot of difference. For instance, in a British ship, an officer must supply his own bed linen, but even in an American L.S.T. clean sheets and pillow-cases were provided for all beds.

All the next day we lay in the Bay, waiting to sail. We were more or less sealed off from the outside world by this time; so much so that I heard no whisper of the fact that Winston Churchill was in Naples.

Again it was a day of sizzling sunshine, and that ship was certainly hot while it lay at anchor. Most of us spent our time wandering around looking for a spot of shade on the boat-deck. The favourite places were the little strips of shifting shade thrown by the Assault Landing Craft slung in giant davits along the side of the landing ship.

Most of my fellow passengers were officers of the staff of General Paschal, a stocky, shy-looking little man with very live eyes who commanded the 45th Division, with whom I had the honour of sailing and landing. I could not have chosen a better outfit with which to sail on such an uncertain operation as a major invasion. These men who wore the "Thunderbird" flash, a golden eagle-like bird on a bright red background, were not only good company, but battle-trying fighters of the first quality. The Fighting Forty-Fifth. Like all good fighting men, the officers of the 45th were quiet and unboastful.

This was a potted history of the Division which I obtained as an admirer of the outfit:

The 45th Division, now entering its second year of combat in Europe (August 1944), was originally a National Guard Division with personnel from Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado. It was called into active Federal Service on September 16, 1940. Since that time it underwent a long series of training at Port Sill, Camp Berkeley, Fort Devens, Pine Camp and, finally, Camp Pickett. Due to the normal changes of time and the inexorable course of war, the Division has since become, and has been ever since entry into combat, a Rainbow Division in every sense of the word, with representatives from every State in the Union. People criticized, but never forgot, the Division.

The first combat that the 45th experienced was with the Seventh Army in Sicily. Following the speedy and successful Sicilian campaign, came Salerno and then the march through Central Southern Italy to Venafro—the long, cold winter in the mountains—and, finally, Anzio. From Sicily to Rome the Division managed to amass more combat days than any other Division in the U.S. Army. Since Rome, however, with the withdrawal of the 45th from the lines, the 34th has taken over first place.

Now the men of the Fighting Forty-Fifth were rearing to go, to even the score and resume the lead as fast as possible.

My first day on board brought a shock which also showed me forcibly what mighty hustlers were these Yanks. I was walking the boat-deck when I was joined by Lieutenant Erickson, who by virtue of his name was popularly known as "Eric the Red" after his obvious Viking ancestor. He was a typical Scandinavian type, fair-hair and blue eyes. Not big, but well built.

As we stood staring out at the L.S.T. fleet around us, he asked me: "Well, Commander, what do you think of my ship?"

That was fairly easy to answer.

"I have been greatly impressed by the neatness and cleanliness of both your ship and ship's company, and that's not just being polite," I said. "It speaks of efficiency."

"I am glad you think that," he went on. "Not bad really. Just ninety days from keel to combat."

"What did you say?"

"Ninety days from keel to combat, Commander. It's like this. The day we touch down on that French beach will be exactly ninety days after they laid the keel of this ship way back in the United States."

It almost took my breath away. NINETY DAYS FROM KEEL TO COMBAT. Only a quick-witted American could express the history of a ship in such a pithy phrase.

"And the ship's company?" I asked.

"Oh, they're even newer. Back last February and March most of them were still civilians."

Although I had spent six months in the United States some years previously, I had not fully appreciated how the Americans really could hustle when they got cracking at top pressure. What I had just heard, however, had me just a bit worried.

If this becomes a really hot show, I could not help thinking, I only hope everything turns out all right. After all you cannot turn out a first-



class naval fighting unit in such a brief time. The British, with their sea-going tradition, hardly move as fast as that.

But I need not have worried. "Eric the Red" himself was a well-trained and experienced officer, and he had had his battle grounding in the Pacific where he played a part in the great Coral Sea Battle. As to the cleanliness, I should not have been at all surprised at it, even under the difficult conditions imposed by a full load of troops on board. After all, I had spent some months of my youth sailing around the world in Scandinavian fo'c'sles, and even in a Scowegian tramp steamer cleanliness rates above godliness. In this ship it certainly was a pointer to efficiency and happiness, two things which go together at sea. I take off my hat to Lieutenant Erickson for the marvel of training he had accomplished with the raw material of a crew by the time we sailed for southern France.

He had really infected the whole of his ship's company with his own enthusiasm. For instance, when general quarters were sounded at dawn and dusk, his men went to their action stations keenly.

I watched the crew of one Oerlikon gun most carefully and with an eye trained by a gunnery course, albeit brief, at Whale Island, Portsmouth, which prides itself on being the greatest naval gunnery school in the world. Those young gunners of L.S.T. 1021 were a revelation. They did not regard this practice as a nuisance. They did not merely stand at their station glumly awaiting the order to secure and pipe down, though dawn in particular is no time for wholehearted enthusiasm.

When they got to their gun at the double, they began to act as though their ship really were in action.

They imagined enemy aircraft attacking their ship, and went through the motions of dealing with such an attack with vim and excitement which were most convincing. They kept practising for all eventualities. Their keenness was reassuring.

On the day before we reached France, I was watching them go through a series of dummy runs. At the end of the drill one of the young gunners turned round grinning and said:

"What's it like to be in action, sir?"

He caught me off balance. That was quite a poser. I had never quite analysed the experience. But the gun's crew were eagerly awaiting an answer. They had not yet heard a shot fired in action.

"Well," I started to explain, "about the only useful thing I can tell you is that it's plenty frightening. Nobody need be afraid of admitting that he's scared in action. If he says otherwise he's either a fool or a liar. The whole thing is to recognize that you're scared and keep cracking.

"If we do run into any trouble, and any of you feel that you're so damned scared you could run, just take a quick glance round. I'll be right behind here, and quite as scared as any of you. That might help a bit."

They laughed at that, not realizing how absolutely truthfully I was speaking. Perhaps they know now. I freely admit that under fire I have been almost paralysed with funk at times. Somehow you get over

it, but I will always envy some types I have known who seem to revel in being shot at.

When I told "Eric the Red" of this talk with his crew, he laughed. "Couldn't have said fairer, myself," he chuckled, though I could hardly imagine him getting jittery.

But here I go wandering away again. Let us get back to Castellamare and Vesuvius. That night, while I slept beneath the galaxy of stars, fanned by a cool night breeze, we sailed. When I awoke we were well at sea, and formed up in an impressive convoy. Three mornings later we would be in France.

Those were halcyon days, ploughing northwards and then westwards towards the narrow channel between Corsica and Sardinia. Eating, lazing, reading, playing cards and sleeping. By day there was competition for the shade on deck. The ship's library provided some excellent and intelligent reading. American Services libraries can knock spots off most of the British efforts. Down on the great stretch of cargo deck the soldiers sunbathed, read, wrote letters or dozed among the great traffic jam. This would probably be their last spell of real rest this side of Germany.

In the cooler hours Frank Pellegrin and his broadcasting boys used to give the ship a bit of entertainment by doing recordings and then running them over the loud-speaker system of the ship—or Public Address system as the Americans always call it. It was a fascinating toy, that wire recorder.

At night there was a choice of cards in the crowded wardroom or sitting smokeless on the black deck, watching the stars and talking. Smokeless, of course. The convoy was thoroughly blacked out, and a glowing cigarette is a suicidal thing on deck.

As to the talk. It was the same as fighting men make the world over on the eve of battle. Rarely a reference to the job to come. Serious conversation turned to the one topic ever present in the minds of all. Home. Wives. Sweethearts. Kiddies. Home. The number of family histories I have heard in the still night watches would make a whole row of very good novels, if only I had the memory and the true gift. And the number of times I have told of Gizi and Tessa would make me blush, if I were a fool. Way back in Naples we had already worked it out that, if things turned out sticky, we would set up our Press unit in fox-holes on the beach. That was settled—why worry about it. We would see all in good time. Now there were two lines of conversation. Home or mere merry persiflage. As action draws nearer it is amazing what stupid jokes will draw a round of laughter.

This mood of persiflage was well reflected in one of the strangest "newspapers" I have ever read.

Somebody—I suspect Frank Pellegrin or "Groucho" Klein—had the brainwave of relieving the shipboard monotony by issuing a daily paper. It consisted of two foolscap sheets written on both sides and run off on a duplicator. It was a very smart job, with drawings and comic cartoons well done with a stylo on a stencil.

I have two of the three issues among my treasured souvenirs. They are here on the table beside me. They were professional jobs, far more convincing than the average ship's newspaper. The title was a masterpiece, *The Invasion Fitters*—drawn in block capitals at the head of the first page, with the word "Jitters" in squiggly outline suggestive of shivers. To the side of this was a rough reproduction of the "Thunderbird" flash.

The second issue, headed "Sunday Edition, 13 August, 1944", starts with an editorial apology: "Due to reasons of security all radios on board ship have been sealed, and no world news is available. However, we will continue to function until the end of the voyage, by using cartoons, articles and scuttlebutt [shipboard gossip]."

The rest of the page was devoted to a rough map of Europe, showing the battlefronts.

Page two was devoted to an article by Eric Severeid. I quote a section of this to show the spirit of the day:

Rising from their fox-holes in the Grande Hotel in Rome, three radio war correspondents, being assured of equable room temperatures and the constant attention of the ship's doctor, in order to preserve their silver voices, have kindly consented to accompany the 45th Division on its present cruise by sea. The short fat one with a moustache is Mr. Vaughn Thomas, of, I believe, the B.B.C. The short, thin one with a moustache is Mr. Chester Morrison, of either the P.B.S. or N.B.S., I believe the latter. The tall, intelligent-looking one is Eric Severeid of C.B.S., as everyone knows.

I was delighted, looking at your insignia, to observe that each and every one of you is an Eagle Scout. . . .

We have varying reasons for visiting France now. I need a clean handkerchief and there are several fresh ones in the left-hand bureau drawer in my Paris apartment. Mr. Thomas left a beer half finished at the Café de la Paix. Mr. Morrison, who writes stories with French characters, wants to find out if the French really talk as they do in his stories. Mr. Morrison also wishes to make recordings for P.B.S. (or N.B.C.) of the crunching of earth as the French families bury their gold in the sock, and the low hum of painters' models posing in the nude. . . .

Some soldiers have inquired of me how to pronounce *Voulez-vous couchez avec moi?* But, of course, since all of you on this boat are loyal to your scout's code, you will not require this phrase. However, if a French girl complains to you that she is very tired, you will be expected, in order to maintain the American Army's reputation for gallantry towards the unfortunate, to say *Voulez-vous couchez chez moi?* If she shows hesitation, explain that your place is a "fox-hole", to differentiate it from the abode of soldiers in other divisions, which is known as a "wolf-hole". This will reassure her at once. . . .

This struck just the right note for fighting men on their way to a nasty bit of work. Nothing serious, please.

It was followed by a section headed "Poopdeck Poets". This covered the following piece of doggerel with the introduction: "Sung to the tune of 'Trees'":

I wish that I would never see  
Another goddam LST  
A nest of cables in her hair—  
A mess of winches everywhere.  
And on her spacious iron deck,  
There isn't room for one fly speck.

I hope this trip will be my last,  
Upon a ship with half a mast.  
A ship where shade is something nil—  
A ship which never will lie still.  
If I must sail on her once more,  
I hope it's to a U.S. shore.

And next day, *The Invasion Jitters* produced its final edition with an Editor's farewell:

With this edition, *The Invasion Jitters* closes its brief but glorious career.

This was followed by a tribute to the Fighting Forty-Fifth, which said in part:

After the war is over and the 45th goes home, it can only be with the satisfaction of a nasty job well done. And as the years go by, many a local bar in all parts of the United States will ring with the familiar notes of: "You think that was rough—say you ought to have been with us at Anzio. . . ." For those, however, not fortunate enough to return, there must be more than just a memory—there must be a firm conviction, planning and work to the end that this must be the last time. For one reason above all that never again shall the blood of the American Doughboy have to make hallow any battlefield in any front in the world.

On the new venture may God be with you and all your comrades for a speedy victory.

There, on the eve of battle, was the only serious note in an editorial of godspeed. The rest of the final edition was devoted to some saucy jokes, a message of thanks to Erickson and his crew, another piece of doggerel, a cartoon and an article by Vaughn Thomas in reply to the guying of Eric Sevareid.

The preparations for this invasion, on board L.S.T. 1021, have been complete and efficient [wrote Vaughn]. We've all got our maps, our life-belts and our atabrine. The Doctor has said prayers over us. Even Seaman Slaterdy, 2nd Class, has at last answered the heart-broken pleadings of the loudspeaker and reported to the bridge immediately. And as a final parting gift, General Marshall himself, invoking with good natured *bonhomie* par, 18b. AR 380-5, September 28, 1942, A 6, 30-7, July 9, 1943, has presented me with a delightful French Phrase Book. This admirable publication has put me in exactly the right mood for stepping gaily ashore on the Riviera. How useful and up-to-date the phrases are. For instance, as I hit the beach, I've only got to turn to page 42 and shout "Ee ah teel day glass-YAY" or "Ee ah teel duh la broo-SA-tuh" (are there any glaciers or jungles around?) to know that the Navy really has landed me in France and not on Saipan or the Aleutians. Then I race up to the nearest inhabitant waving page 36: "Dawn-nay MWA duh lal-kawl poor freeks-YAWNG" (Give me some rubbing alcohol) and if that fool editor thinks I'm going to rub myself with any alcohol I get hold of, he's got another guess coming.

Finally, safe on the right beach, and perfumed with rubbing alcohol, you turn to the sentence that clinches the whole deal. You'll find it on page 39. And it's beautifully simple: "Luh goo-vayrn-MAHNG dayz ay-tahz ew-NEE voo pay-RA" ("The Government of the United States will pay you!"). With that sentence firmly fixed in your mind, your stay in France will certainly be amongst your happiest wartime souvenirs.

Now, all this is excellent for France. But, on board with you, you have four Britons and, speaking as one of them, I would also have been delighted if General Marshal

had stretched a point in par: 186, AR 380.5, Sept. 28 1942 AG 300.7 Jul. 9 43, and presented me with an American Phrase Book as well.

Mind you, my colleague, Eric Severeid (C.B.S. and the handsome correspondent), has given me a very clear picture of the United States themselves. I now know that they start at New York, where everyone has a name like Harry the Horse and is in the clothing business. Then the States go on, through the hills of West Virginia, full of gentlemen with long beards posing for "Esquire", to Chicago.

Apparently we in England have been misinformed about Chicago. It's really a quiet, homelike town, where community hymn-singing is the main occupation, linked with a little meat-packing. Then onwards over the limitless plains of the Middle West, where nothing breaks the level cornfields (except the statue of Eric Severeid in the campus of the University of Wisconsin), until you reach the Rockies. These mountains, as everyone in Britain knows, are nothing but dude ranches and Bing Crosby singing "Home on the Range", surrounded by little "doggies" (whatever they may be), to the Pacific Coast to San Francisco, which consists entirely of one large bridge lined with Californians and Aimee Semple Macpherson cheering the Fleet through the Golden Gate.

Yes—I flatter myself that Severeid has given me a pretty accurate portrait of America. But—I'm still baffled by the language! Why does my bunk-mate smile when I politely ask him to knock me up in the morning? What are the G.I.s? What is "bunk fatigue" and "gold bricking"? Where is the "fanny" and how do you "park it"?

I'm having a swell time on board. The food is excellent, the water is iced and plentiful. But oh! How I wish I spoke the language. So I'm hoping that General Marshall hurries up with the Phrase Book. If he doesn't, there's only one thing for it. I'll have to page Seaman Slaterdy, 2nd Class, immediately. For I'd like him to translate this message from us all: "Your four British colleagues on board send you their warmest wishes for a good landing. They are very proud indeed to be going in with you!"

That struck the keynote of this strange and short-lived "newspaper"—which really began with news—and also the spirit of the voyage. Perhaps, according to the best peacetime standards, it does not rate as the quintessence of humour. But it was the humour of a very special occasion and should be read as such.

To me it brings back one mood of the voyage across the Tyrrhenian Sea and up the west coast of Corsica.

As to the visual picture, one scene is deeply imprinted in my memory. It is nearly sunset. The convoy is sailing almost dead into the golden eye of the setting sun, against which are silhouetted the elephantine hulls of the leading ships in two long columns of tank landing ships. Astern the rear ships of the convoy are already misted by the gathering dusk. And far astern can be seen the leading vessels of another section of the armada which is heading towards France.

Away to starboard steam some strange-looking ships which we have been puzzling out for some time. One of them seems to be fitted up with masts like giant telegraph poles, and aerial systems which suggest that her job has something to do with Radar. Ahead of her is another sea-going "monstrosity" which I identify for my companions as a ship which is a floating dock for small craft, which she absorbs into her belly fitted up like an engineering factory. Nearer still are one of those weird gantry ships, an oil tanker transformed by great rugby goalpost structures which are the gantry cranes for hoisting into the water her cargo of assault landing craft.

Ahead of us the sky is golden and red, merging into that deep Mediterranean blue overhead, and running away into twilight blues and gentle greens astern. And the endless, smooth sea takes its changing colours from the sky. All is beauty, calm and peace. The convoy steams steadily on into the gloaming.

Then suddenly we are torn out of our quietude. "Darken ship." "General quarters." There is a sound of running feet. The ship's company are hurrying to their action stations. We are back again in the midst of the man-made war. We find our way down to the wardroom and the card-table. Cheerful Negro stewards bring in the coffee. We are back in man's world.

On the Sunday we gathered on deck for a non-denominational church service led by the doctor of the ship. On the forward section of the boat-deck gather the officers, and below us, among the mass of vehicles which form the deck cargo, cluster the men. Each of us holds a single duplicated sheet, the Order of Service.

#### CHURCH SERVICE ABOARD L.S.T. 1021 FOR ALL DENOMINATIONS

*Sunday,*

*August 13, 1944.*

#### ORDER OF SERVICE

1. Hymn: "My Country 'Tis of Thee" (first and last verses).

My country, 'tis of thee,  
Sweet land of liberty,  
Of thee I sing;  
Land where my fathers died,  
Land of the pilgrim's pride,  
From every mountain side  
Let freedom ring!

(And I am thinking of such a different land from those around me. A land of very green fields, a little house on the outskirts of London where live the two I hold most dear in all the world.)

Our father's God, to Thee,  
Author of liberty,  
To Thee we sing;  
Long may our land be bright  
With freedom's holy light;  
Protect us by Thy might,  
Great God, our King. . . . Amen.

2. Reading of 23rd Psalm—Dr. Clinton R. Coulter.
3. Period of Silent Prayer.

(Good heavens, how long is it since I did pray with all my heart. How should I pray? I can think only of those two so far away. Let me ask God to watch over them. May they never have to read that letter

I left behind in Naples—just in case. I can't very well pray for myself—for my own safety. It wouldn't be fair. After all, I've been a pretty heathenish type. Now I want to pray. I suppose this is what you would call slit-trench Christianity. Ah, the Doc is starting to speak.)

4. Prayer read by Dr. Clinton R. Coulter.

(I don't care much for these formalized prayers.)

5. Hymn: "Onward, Christian Soldiers" (first and last verses).

(That's better. From what I recall from my less heathenish childhood that's one of the few songs in the hymn-book worth singing.)

Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,  
With the Cross of Jesus going on before.

6. Short talk on France—Aspirant Marcel De Pierres.

(This kid bores me.)

7. Hymn: "God Bless America" (one verse).

God bless America,  
Land that I love,  
Stand beside her, and guide her  
Through the night with a light from above;  
From the mountains, to the prairies,  
To the oceans white with foam;  
God bless America,  
My home, sweet home.

The service is over. I never did care for formalized religion. But somehow I felt a bit happier, a bit calmer, a bit steadier now.

That night I lay beneath the stars and prayed again, in my own crazy, conversational way. It does help, somehow.

Monday, August 14: There's the distant outline of Corsica away to starboard. Looks different again from this angle. Hullo, there's some bigger stuff inshore. A battle-waggon and cruisers. All going to the party.

In the afternoon there are quite a few of us gathered on the forward section of the boat-deck staring ahead. Not that we expect to see anything, but ahead there lies our destination—France. Nothing between us and the target now except a small stretch of sea. "Eric the Red" comes up to me.

"Come and see where we are going to, Commander?" he invites.

"Thanks, I'd like to."

We step through a doorway into a dark cabin. The door closes behind us, and we are in darkness.

"There you are, Commander—France." The voice of "Eric the

Red" comes out of the blackness. And then, against the opposite bulkhead I see the fluorescent screen of the Radar set. A wavy line traces the coast of France still out of sight, but recorded on this strange little screen.

I gaze at this manifestation of modern magic for a while, and then Lieutenant "Eric the Red" Erickson leads the way out on deck again. In the sunshine we loll and talk. And the topic—as ever—home and loved ones. Erickson comes from Los Angeles. I know it, but how it must have grown up since last I saw it in 1927. He tells me all about the growth of Los Angeles. He tells me about his home, his wife. I am reminiscing about Gizi and Tessa and that little piece of unattainable heaven which is prosaically called "St. Loman" (after my first ship in this war), 190 Harefield Road, Uxbridge, Middlesex, England.

We swap addresses, and make each other promise to come visiting in Los Angeles and London. We fall silent.

Then "Eric the Red" must be off about his duties again. I wander to the after end of the boat-deck to look at that ingenious device spread out there by the Army. It is a scale reproduction of the section of the French coast where we are going to land, made of moulded rubber and measuring about five feet by four. Hills, woods, streams, houses, roads. All are faithfully reproduced here in spongy rubber which can be rolled up without doing any harm.

It had been used that morning for an *al fresco* briefing of officers on the operation. We had gathered around it to hear the final instructions and to ask questions.

I had also heard "Eric the Red" giving his lads their final briefing and pep talk. Once again he had hammered home the idea of cleanliness, and instilled into the minds of these new-made matelots who were going into action for the first time the idea that they were the best ship's company, in the best ship, in the best flotilla, in the best squadron, in the best fleet in the world.

When it came to sailing and fighting a ship, and leading and inspiring men, "Eric the Red" had what it takes.

Dusk. "General Quarters." The youngsters of U.S.S. L.S.T. 1021 go to action stations. This is the last dummy run. Tomorrow it will be the real thing.

That evening a few of us foregather for a party. The precious bottles of whisky and gin and other tipples are produced. Quietly now. This is a dry ship. "God damn Josephus Daniels."

Somehow I've got no stomach tonight for whisky and whoopee. It's happier up on deck, up there in the darkness. I stroll the deck for a while, enjoying the coolness of the night. Dimly the other ships around loom up through the darkness. The sea sparkles with phosphorescence. Now I am at peace with the world. Let tomorrow take care of itself.

And so to bed again beneath the stars.



## CHAPTER X

## HULLO, FRANCE

I DIDN'T need an alarm clock that morning—D-day. August 15, 1944. H-hour eight o'clock. A daylight party.

But it was still dark, well before dawn, when I awoke. The men of the adjacent gun's crew, long since closed up to action stations, were talking quietly among themselves. It was not that which had awakened me. I had set myself to wake early.

Gone was the Mediterranean night brilliance. A few stars were faintly visible through thin cloud. We were steaming silently, darkly over a glassy sea through a faint mist which had come up in the hour before dawn. Dimly through the mist I could see the dark bulk of other ships on either hand. We were getting near the "waiting area".

I strolled forward to the break of the boat-deck, groping my way past the broadcasting boys who were already checking over the recording machine. Still there was nothing to see except the dark outlines of the nearest ships of the convoy.

Around me other dim figures were standing along the rail peering ahead. Destiny lay ahead.

Then there was some bustle about the deck. The lads with the nastiest job were getting away. That meant 5 a.m.—H-minus three hours. I did not envy this hardy quartette of matelots. They were the men of the "Shallow Water Mine Sweeping Unit" which has the job of sweeping a lane to the shore for the L.S.T.

Now they were clambering down into a landing craft which lay alongside. Their job is best described in a flippant tone in a few paragraphs which appeared in the last edition of *The Invasion Fitters*:

The lads drop over the side in an L.C.T. at H-minus three hours, when we are about seven miles out from "X marks the spot". (The senior member of the party, Robert T. Moss, of Chester, Pennsylvania, says it isn't *his* idea, though!) Anyway, they have a rendezvous with several more L.C.T.s filled with zanies. Cables are strung between the boats and at about a mile and a half off shore they sweep a path some 400 yards wide.

They keep up this nonsense until either they or the Jerries decide they've gone close enough to the beach for all practical purposes. They're supposed to be finished sweeping at H-minus 55 minutes. What worries them is that they're liable to be finished before that.

When asked what happens if the L.C.T. itself hits a mine, coxswain Langston frowned and growled, "It ain't in the manual!"

There they went now on one of the nastiest jobs of the operation. Silently I wished them well.

Still I gazed out into the darkness and tried to visualize what was happening there according to the plan as I knew it. Now the mine-sweepers were hard at work. All sorts of minesweepers, from the

destroyer-like Fleet sweepers to the little M.L.s, working close to shore, and also our friends who have just dropped over the side.

Out there in the blackness on the port bow are my friends of the two Canadian infantry landing ships, the *Prince David* and *Prince Henry*. By this time they have unloaded their passengers into the square little assault landing craft. Those are the French Commandos—tough customers—who are going ashore well to our left to deal with some awkwardly placed batteries. From what I saw of one job done by French Commandos later, I would not care to have been a Hun on their sector that morning.

The mystifying thing about the whole operation to date is the peacefulness, the silence. Away in the distance are some faint sounds, maybe gunfire, maybe bombs.

Right ahead, about seven or eight miles, is the beach near that pleasant little Riviera resort of Ste. Maxime, not as well known to British tourists as it deserves. Beyond that is St. Tropez, lying at the head of its own bay. Away to starboard is St. Raphael.

Now the dawn is breaking. Well—here we go. Now something dramatic should happen. Just then there is a sharp, shattering roar from astern of us. A sheet of orange flame. Yes, I know, sharp and shattering hardly go with the word roar. But that is exactly how it sounded, all the same. It was the French cruiser *Gloire* opening up. What a tragic duty for these Frenchmen. To have to bombard their own country and their own compatriots in support of a landing of liberation.

Now the light is growing, and the sound of gunfire is increasing. But we, in the waiting area, seem to be in an oasis of calm. It is all so “undramatic” that I am starting to get bored with this invasion. Without the slightest thought of bravado, I wander back to my stretcher bed, and, slipping off shoes, I lie down for forty winks. I am just dropping off to sleep when there is the most shattering, tearing noise. My heart turns a somersault, and I am up off that bed in a flash. What’s happened. A torpedo? A shell? Are we hit?

Another shattering, rending roar and I see what it is all about. Lashed along the outside of the hull of the L.S.T. are two great steel pontoons more than a hundred feet long. These are our own piers which we have brought with us to the invasions. I had not paid much attention to them on the way over, nor given thought how they were to be released.

Now I see the idea. The lashings are cut, and the great pontoons fall into the sea alongside our ship, making that terrific clatter as they go. My heart stops thumping. The pontoons are floating easily on either side. Now men are climbing on them, ready to ride in with them to the beach.

It is almost full morning light by now, and the gunfire is growing still. From the break of the boat-deck there is still not much to see right ahead. The beach is somewhere there through the slowly dispersing morning mist.

Out here, seven or eight miles offshore, we can see the shape of the great armada. And this is only one of three beaches—Delta Beach—the central point of landing.

L.S.T. 1021 is in the centre of a herd of similar sea-elephants. Farther out, in an arc around us, are the cruisers of three nations—British, American, French. And farther still, as yet indistinguishable, are a battle-waggon or two. Five or six miles away on the port quarter are other great ships—familiar outlines. They are the troop transports, among them liners famous on transatlantic runs in the days of peace. They carry the reinforcements which will follow such spearhead outfits as the Fighting Forty-Fifth into battle.

7.30 a.m. Half an hour to go—then the main assault wave will go racing in.

Our broadcasting quartette are getting into their stride, scanning the scene and then typing furiously. Sheet after sheet they toss their stories to me and the two Army censors to be “cleaned” before they record it. I have never been trained in censorship. My orders are simple: “Use your common sense.” So, when faced with a sheet of descriptive copy, I study it with a German eye. I try to imagine that I am a German intelligence officer sitting in a dug-out ashore, with a transcription of the intercepted broadcast in front of me, and trying to glean some useful information from it. The two Army types, British Captain Barker and his American “oppo”, have had a long training in the art of censorship, but right now the job is mainly a naval one and I am using “common sense”.

There is to be a little direct broadcasting from the beach-head. A couple of war correspondents in the U.S.S. *Catocin*, the American flagship from which the whole naval side of the show is being directed by the American C-in-C. They have good facilities for brief “voice-casts” which will be picked up in Rome and rebroadcast to the world. In this L.S.T. there is also an arrangement for similar broadcasts by the “silver-voiced quartette”. But it is a rather hit-or-miss performance. There is no guarantee that such broadcasts will get through in sufficient strength to be recorded at the other end.

The broadcasters go to the “mike” linking them with the outside world, and recite their pieces into the blue. As it turns out, the reception at the other end is very patchy. But “Chet” Morrison, quiet, whimsical “Chet”, is the lucky one. His voice gets through, and he has a world beat on the invasion of southern France. At the same time the broadcasters are pouring a steady flow of impressions on to the wire recorder, a machine not much bigger than a portable typewriter. When we hit that beach, it will be my job to see that the reels of wire get taken off to the *Catocin*, where they will be picked up by a Catalina flying-boat and rushed back to Italy. Within a few hours of our arrival on that beach people sitting at wireless sets in Kansas City, San Francisco, Manchester, Glasgow, Melbourne—all over the world—will be listening to a full description of the scene which now lies before us.

7.35 a.m. In a great arc astern of us, the big ships are in full voice.

Time after time from the forward turrets of the cruisers comes the belch of flame, the great cloud of smoke and—a second or two later—the roar as another salvo speeds towards the enemy strongpoints and concentrations way up in those distant hills. We have been told at the briefing that the German troops in this sector are a very scratch variety of mixed nationalities in the main, with a small proportion of real battle divisions which have been brought to southern France for reorganization. I cannot imagine them enjoying the Navy's air-borne presents at this moment. Way out there towards the horizon a battle-waggon, too distant to identify, is throwing a steady stream of death ashore.

Every time that Frenchman right astern of us lets loose, I jump just a little. The Frenchman has such a sharp, shattering note, which is followed by a wave of air as though a giant had given you a gentle push.

7.40 a.m. A British cruiser steams around our waiting area, moving to a new position for bombardment. The sun is breaking through the morning mists and the sky is clearing. Her great white battle ensigns flaunt proudly in the morning rays. I do not know why, but the White Ensign, with its red St. George's Cross and Union flag in the first canton, stir me deeply. I call Vaughn Thomas's attention to our British visitor. He looks up from his typewriter. Three British Fleet minesweepers, the short flagstaffs on their trailing "otters" making a feather in the water all too like the trail of a periscope, move through our waiting area. We give them a wave as they pass close to. Great chaps these minesweepers. They go in first, the large and the small—particularly the latter—and, no matter what the enemy chucks at them, they keep plugging along at their vital job until it is done. Day after day they sweep. With the landing craft they form the Navy's spearhead.

7.45 a.m. From the break of the boat-deck we gaze at the distant, yellow shoreline. Close in, seeming at this distance to be almost up on the beach, our destroyers—British and American—steam backwards and forwards duelling with the enemy batteries ashore. The sharp outlines of the shore are blurred by rolling clouds of smoke. This is constantly punctured by yellow flashes as the enemy guns fire back at the destroyers, the minesweepers and the Landing Craft—Guns which are working close inshore. Much earlier a comparatively new secret weapon, motor-boats crammed with demolition explosives, have gone tearing in to blow up the underwater obstructions the enemy has installed near the beaches.

The bombardment continues sporadically. There is no steady roar as I had expected.

7.50 a.m. Ten minutes to H-hour. The gunfire continues in a rolling, thunderous crescendo.

7.55 a.m. Five minutes to H-hour. There go the L.C.I.s with the first wave of assault troops. The Fighting Forty-Fifth are going in. Good luck, chaps. British L.C.I.s, too, to judge by the height of their bridges. But not "Tackline's" party. They are way over there to port on the outlying landing beaches. To judge by the heavier bombardment from

that direction, they are having a rougher time. Through a pair of borrowed field-glasses I watch the L.C.I.s racing for our beach, "Delta Beach", their little White Ensigns streaming defiantly in the light breeze.

8 a.m. H-HOUR. The yellow flashes which dot the smoke pall along the beaches come faster. The destroyers erupt in renewed fury. Out here, seven miles off shore, it is strangely quiet and peaceful. This group of sea-elephants, waiting for their turn to go to the beaches, must present a beautiful target. But still nothing comes our way. Those French Commandos must have done a good job of work on that heavy battery away to port. They had. Just then we get our one and only parting present from the Hun. About 200 yards away on the port beam, and just astern of another L.S.T., two little fountains of water tipped with a wisp of smoke spring up. They are preceded by a slight popping sound. Must be eighty-eights with range boosters on the shells. Yet they seem so half-hearted, thank God. "I shot an arrow in the air, it came to earth I know not where." That was the sort of gunnery it seemed. I could just imagine a couple of German gunners talking. "All right, Hans, let us chuck these last two out into the anchorage, and then we'll get moving back into the hills."—"Jawohl, Freidrich, don't bother to train the old gun—just give her maximum elevation and let 'em go."

8.5 a.m. Some of us clustered round the entrance to the wheel-house. An officer of the ship was relaying odd fragments of signals which the radio men were snatching out of the air. The ether was fairly sizzling. But, to judge by the relayed fragments we heard, everything was going perfectly—more than perfectly. Now we should not be long. I was expecting one of the assault landing craft to be lowered from the great davits to take General Paschal ashore. No such luck. We were waiting our turn to go in. But with a General on board we should head the procession.

By now it was a glorious sunny day. High in the bright sky fighters from our aircraft-carriers, British and American, roared on guard. No German aircraft appeared to accept the challenge. Lightnings raced overhead. Then the throb in the skies grew louder. Yes—there they were, like great silvery flies thousands of feet up, and heading for the coast away to our right near St. Raphael. Bombers! They passed over the coastline, and soon turned around to fly back seaward, from whence they had come. Just then there was a terrific rumbling roar away to the right. A blanket of bombs had descended upon some German strongpoint close to the beach. Even from this distance it was an awe-inspiring sight. A great stretch of ground seemed to be erupting in a cloud of smoke and pulverized earth. To judge by that pretty piece of bombing and the steady bombardment away there, "Tackline" and "Pat" were having a rather sticky time. Apparently "Delta Beach" was the best place for a picnic.

Still we waited—impatient to get a close-up of the war. It was getting on towards mid-day when the order came to move in. Already some of the merchant ships carrying supplies and reinforcements were

anchoring closer in, two or three miles from the beach. It was a lovely day for an invasion. The whole anchorage extending miles out from St. Tropez and Ste. Maxime-sur-Mer was one great bustle. Merchant ships, warships of many varieties, landing craft—tank landing craft, L.C.M.s, L.C.I.s—mingled over this short stretch of sea. There was a sort of regatta spirit prevailing, for the enemy, it appeared, had not put up much resistance on the beaches. In the main they had done a bunk to the hills. Vaughn Thomas was particularly interested as we drew near the beach. In days of peace he had known this stretch of coast very well, and he pointed out the landmarks.

"Just over there," he said, pointing towards a very nice piece of beach, "there should be two glorious blondes. At least that is where they were when I was here last."

But, to our deep sorrow, the blondes were gone. Now we could see the effects of the bombing and bombardment upon the villas fronting right on the beach. Thanks to the weak resistance of the Germans, the damage was surprisingly light. There was one nasty patch of blackened devastation where a rocket ship had delivered its packet. About half a mile away to the right, where a German blockhouse was situated, a desperate little duel was still going on. A few death-or-glory Huns were still holding out. We could see the flashes from their guns at regular intervals. But still no shells came our way. Those Huns were a bit too busy repelling invaders to worry about the anchorage.

We joined other landing craft which were jockeying for position a couple of hundred yards off the beach. The beach itself, a golden stretch of sand about a mile long, was divided into three sections marked by big banners as "Yellow", "Red" and "Green" beaches. Ours was "Red Beach". An L.C.M., identified in big letters painted on the hull as the boat of the "Red Beachmaster", came out to us, and through a loud hailer called beaching instructions to "Eric the Red" Erickson. On the beach itself stood one of the beachmasters, a young American officer, with a megaphone. He was the traffic controller for this milling, orderly mob.

All along the golden blondeless sands landing craft were discharging their vehicles as fast as they could go. Down the ramps rolled the tanks, trucks, jeeps, wireless cars and other varieties of fighting vehicles, armoured and thin-skinned, to struggle over the steel mesh paths leading across the beach and up through gaps in the concrete sea wall to the road. At intervals the great steel pontoons jutted out from the beach as jetties.

On board L.S.T. 1021 we were having our last shipboard parade.

"Got your K rations yet?" asked Frank Pellegrin.

"K rations? No. I've got a big box of '10 in 1' rations your Navy supplied me for this job."

"Oh, you'd better get the K rations. They're distributing them up there on the forward deck among the vehicles."

K rations are the American equivalent of our iron rations. A brown chocolate box about eight or nine inches long, four inches wide and a

couple of inches deep, wrapped in heavily waxed paper. They contain an interesting little collection of supplies, scientifically packed. Inside the box you find biscuits wrapped in cellophane, sweets, sugar, a tin of minced ham and eggs or similar food, salt, two tiny cellophane packets containing a nutritious soup mixture and a milk coffee powder, and, finally, a packet of five good cigarettes and some book matches. All the food-stuffs are designed by scientists to contain a superabundance of vitamins, calories and what have you for a fighting man.

I had already explored my "10 in 1" rations (ten days' rations for one man or one day's rations for ten men), with their packets labelled for breakfast, lunch and dinner each day and similar in get-up to the K rations, their larger tins of pork bulk, butter and other delicacies. All tightly packed in a cardboard box strengthened with hoop iron. I had marvelled at the American thoroughness which included toilet paper, soap, paper towels and most ingenious tiny tin-openers.

But until I threaded my way through the maze of vehicles on the great foredeck and joined the queue drawing K rations in the shade of the fo'c'sle head, I just didn't know how thorough those Americans were when they went to war. The combined "Guide to France and Phrase Book" and the "10 in 1" rations had duly impressed me, but the crowning touch was now provided. One officer handed me my box of K rations, and another proffered a small white box about an inch square and a little square white envelope. With these I made my way back to the boat-deck.

The little white box contained some aspirin-like white tablets, but no instructions. I inquired, and was told that these were salt tablets which were taken to combat heat prostration.

The little square white envelope looked familiar. It looked like . . . yes, it was! A good old "dreadnought". One of those rubber protective gadgets for the amorously inclined. One of those things which you did not talk about in polite company. I had issued many of them to shore-going matelots in my day.

I had noticed that the officer ahead of me in the ration queue had been handed two of these little envelopes. Not that I wanted one, but, Hell! I must be starting to look older than my 40 years. ONE "dreadnought" was my ration.

On the boat-deck I fell into conversation with General Paschal's Chief of Staff, a grey-haired colonel.

"Do you know, sir, I'm going to issue a writ against the War Department in Washington," I said with a serious expression.

"How's that?" he asked.

I told him of my experience in the K ration queue, and added:

"A serious reflection on my virility. I'll sue 'em. I ask you, do I look as old as all that. Dammit I'll sue 'em!"

That is the sort of feeble joke you make in such circumstances.

The Colonel grinned broadly, and capped my bit of a joke. From his pocket he took another small white envelope.

"Here, take this one," he said. "I'm getting on in years too. That's all they gave me, but you're welcome to it."

So he saved the honour of the American Army and the pocket of the War Department in Washington.

By now our L.S.T. was edging in alongside the pontoon jetty. We all stood by our vehicles ready to disembark. And at last we were rolling down the ramp to the beach. Still nothing happened.

"Some invasion," I remarked to the American officer beside me. "Just like a day trip to Margate."

I had never been to Margate, and he had never heard of it. But, apart from the uniforms, the warships and the fighting vehicles, it struck me that this is something like what it would be on a day trip to Margate. As easy as all that. I looked towards the tree-clad hills a few miles inland, and remarked: "Thar's Huns in them there hills."

"Thanks a lot, Digger," said Frank Pellegrin, handing me a bright red canvas bag containing the radio recordings, and leaving me on the beach to try and find where the U.S.S. *Catoclin* was and get the bag on board within an hour. "Groucho" Klein stayed with me to see for the future what was the art of persuading the Navy to give me a boat to hunt the anchorage.

Dodging round a bulldozer which was nosing a truck out of the soft sand in which it was stuck, we went in search of the beachmaster. Luck was in. Although he was working flat out at his task of making order out of seeming chaos, calling in this and that landing craft, keeping the streams of vehicles moving fast, answering a stream of questions, he lent a sympathetic ear to my pleading. Perhaps it was the uniform. As the only British officer in sight at this stage of proceedings, I had a sort of rarity value in this American kaleidoscope. He was just courteous and helpful by nature, and even went through the motions of refusing the half bottle of whisky which I offered him for assistance now and in the future. That whisky was precious stuff on the beach. Should any reader think of going on an invasion with the American Army, I would suggest that he takes along a half case of Scotch as his luggage. The Americans will just about let him run the invasion his own way for that much Scotch.

In this case the beachmaster called his own boat, the L.C.M., in to the beach, and told the junior officer in charge of it to take me out in the anchorage to hunt the *Catoclin*. In that crowd of ever-shifting shipping that was quite a hunt. First of all we tracked the flagship of the American Rear-Admiral in command of that particular sector of operations.

"Oh yes—the *Catoclin*—she's lying a few miles to the east."

Through the binoculars I picked her out away off there. She had a quite distinctive silhouette, tall, square-built with goalpost masts something like a gantry ship and a mass of Radar and wireless aerials.

So, with the beachmaster's boat threading its way through the lines of landing craft and ships heading towards the beach, we eventually reached the *Catoclin*.



Just then "Groucho" Klein pointed at the sky.

"There comes the PBY," he said. "We'll have to hurry."

And, sure enough, there was the flying-boat about to land near the *Catoctin*.

"PBY?" I asked. "Looks like a Catalina to me. I thought Frank Pellegrin said they were sending a Catalina, anyway."

"Groucho" laughed. "Sure, we're both right. A PBY is a Catalina."

That is the trouble with these Americans. I'm pretty groggy on aircraft identification at the best of times, but the Americans always confuse me a bit extra by naming their aircraft with letters and figures. To me a Mitchell medium bomber is a Mitchell medium bomber. But to them it's a collection of letters and figures.

As the PBY Catalina touched down, we raced for the flagship. We had been warned that the aircraft would not stay a minute longer than necessary. But I had still to remember my manners as a visitor to this invasion. I had carefully studied American naval etiquette as it varies from ours, particularly the double salute—first to the flag aft and then to the officer of the watch—as you step aboard an American ship of war.

Half a dozen boats were jockeying to get to the gangway of the flagship, and we were about seventh in the queue. I gave thanks for a stentorian voice, and hailed the deck for permission to come alongside on urgent business.

With about three minutes to spare "Groucho" and I lodged that precious red bag safely for dispatch in the flying-boat, and as we headed back for Red Delta Beach we had the satisfaction of seeing the 'plane take off and head southwards, carrying the full description of the invasion to be heard over the radios of the world that very night.

Now we had time to look around and think. Yes, it was a remarkable invasion. At this time it was only H plus 6, six hours after the main assault on D-day in a major invasion, and yet everything as far as we could see was moving like clockwork without any interference from the enemy. Here, off Delta Beach, was an armada which formed a dream target for any gunner, but not a shell fell in the anchorage, and not a single German aircraft appeared to have a crack at the assemblage. Over to the east, in the direction of "Tackline's" beach, our big ships were still hammering away at the enemy, and way out on our sector a cruiser or battle-waggon occasionally flung a few bricks well inland to help the advancing troops. But, in general, this was an invasion to my taste. No scrambling into slit trenches, or digging in on a beach.

Ashore again, we found the troops and vehicles still rolling along in a great stream. The L.C.I.s were nosing right up to the sand or almost, and the troops, holding guns and equipment high, waded through waste-deep water to the shore, a welcome and cooling dip on a day which was now grilling.

Already safe paths were marked with the white tapes which the engineers lay to show where they have swept the mines. Along the road were the sign-boards. Along the concrete sea wall some of the locals stood watching the tide of liberation. They smiled, cheered and shouted

their welcomes. Here was what they had waited some long, grim years to see. And along the beach road a constant stream of vehicles and guns headed inland, while infantry trudged along at the side through the clouds of white dust.

Where was the Divisional Command Post of the 45th? A military policeman at a crossroads hailed an already crowded jeep.

"Where you going, bud?" The driver explained. "Good, that takes you past 45th Divisional Command Post. Take this British naval officer and this major along with you."

"Sure."

We climbed on board, the G.I.s squeezing up to give us seats. We joined the stream of vehicles crawling nose to tail along a rough dirt road, past vineyards, woods, quickly growing ammo and petrol dumps. Near the beach a small landing strip for those remarkable little aeroplanes, the Piper Cubs, which can take off from a pocket handkerchief to fly on their artillery spotting missions, had already been made. A couple of the sky-skates were already there. Earlier these aerial midgets had flown off landing craft.

Clustered along the road were groups of peasants, oblivious to the clouds of white dust which the vehicles threw over everything. Already the vineyards were grey with a pall of dust. Dust which seemed to seep through your skin, right into the bloodstream, dust which seemed to take the skin off your eyeballs.

Anyone who has been through the battlefields of North Africa, Sicily and Italy has a bit of an idea of dust. As a connoisseur of dust, I still give the palm to the dust of the Riviera. It wins by virtue of a razor-like cutting edge which slices your eyes into neat ribbons.

"If this is the millionaires' playground," I remarked to "Groucho", "I'm content with my poverty at last."

At last—tired, sun-burned, dust-caked, we found our party established at the Command Post in a hillside pinewood on the outskirts of Ste. Maxime-sur-Mer. I don't know why General Paschal should choose to spend the night in a pinewood when every house in Ste. Maxime was his for the asking. But there we were. The censorship truck was parked in a vineyard at the foot of the pinewood slope.

More and more war correspondents were starting to track us down. I had left word with the beachmasters of Delta Beach where we were to be found. Typewriters were rattling, and copy was flowing in to be censored and then put in the bag for the morning collection by the Catalina. All the news coming through to the Command Post was good. The enemy were still retreating way back in the hills. The American infantry was beating down the scattered resistance. Casualties for the landing had been remarkably light. Away beyond St. Raphael the Germans had made a better stand, but all along the line good progress had been made and was still being made.

After a K ration meal, washed down with good American coffee, I wandered down into Ste. Maxime—to explore the night life in these parts. Men, women, children—young and old—were out to welcome

the "liberators". It was mighty nice to be a "liberator". Smiles, greetings, wine on every hand. Everyone wanted to shake hands with or kiss a liberator that evening.

At a crossroads in the town I paused to ask my way. The old lady to whom I spoke insisted on my stepping into her home for a drink, and her husband came hurrying to welcome me. The first evening of the invasion I spent sitting in a lovely garden, drinking wine and discussing the terrible years of occupation with this elderly French couple to whom I represented freedom. Their thanks, their welcome, were embarrassing. They apologized for keeping me from the company of younger people, but explained how proud they were to have one of the gallant liberators as a guest. I was glad it was growing dark to hide my embarrassment. I felt a bit of a fool, a bit of an impostor. For me, through no fault of my own and in keeping with my own wishes, the invasion had been a walk over. I had done no fighting. Yet here I was being treated as a hero. Made me feel damn' silly.

The old couple insisted that I return for dinner the next evening. I protested. I knew that they were short of food in France, particularly along this coast which used to depend so much upon North Africa for supplies. They insisted that this was a good season for food, and they had saved up for just such an occasion. Anyway, monsieur was not able to eat much of anything because of his health. The only thing of which they were short was cooking fat. I could fix that with a tin of butter and a tin of pork bulk in the morning. At last I could not escape the invitation without being downright rude. So it was arranged. Did I like aubergines. I did. I must come into the kitchen garden and take a peep at the prize aubergine which would be cooked for tomorrow's celebration.

So, with the blessing of this charming old couple, I strolled back through the warm summer night to the bivouac. The Press gang were throwing a party, having acquired a supply of very good wine. I contributed a bottle of my precious Scotch to the pool.

That night I slept soundly in the vineyard under the stars. A judicious mixture of Scotch, Burgundy and champagne is a good sleeping-draught on an invasion. The only trouble was, as I found in the shivering light of dawn, that I had a marcel wave in my spine. I had slept across the vineyard furrows, instead of down them.

Next morning we were up early and away. Now we were saying good-bye to our friends of the Fighting Forty-Fifth. I was sorry to leave these new friends. I had as a souvenir one of their Thunderbird flashes which made me an honorary member of the Division. But the Press gang were off to new quarters in a French millionaire's seaside villa close to the large mansion where the American Sixth Corps had set up its headquarters. This was the fount of news, so that is where we should be. Soon the Army had a big wireless van working to carry part of the copy to Rome, but the bulk of it still had to go by air from the *Catoclin* twice a day.

I agreed to take on the job of scrounging boats and chasing the *Catoclin* as she shifted her berth around the anchorage. "Groucho"

Klein kept me company most times, driving the jeep to the waterfront. The next five days I spent between censorship duties, looking after a few correspondents accredited to the Navy and seeing that the copy got away by air.

The first evening I went to dinner with my old French couple. I had taken the precaution of slipping down to the house early in the day and leaving a tin of butter and a large tin of pork bulk. That, I thought, should furnish the basis of the night's meal.

On the way through Ste. Maxime I discovered that the smartest peacetime night haunt had already reopened. This place, "L'Hermitage", was a small night-club with a bar and small dance-floor. It was a find. For the proprietor had already been to the hills and dug up his hidden supplies of brandy, and tomorrow he would go there and get a cache of champagne. That was a regular practise with the French when the Germans moved in—to bury their good supplies in the hills. And was that brandy good! The great advantage of "L'Hermitage" also was that the American military authorities had placed it "off limits" to their officers, and it did not become too crowded or exorbitant. At first the only outsiders were myself and the Press gang.

So, with a few very good brandies under the belt, I went on to dinner. That dinner was a revelation. My bulk pork was nowhere in evidence, but the butter had been partly used for the cooking, which Madame had had to carry out on a charcoal stove in the back garden as there was no gas or electricity supply in Ste. Maxime.

Dinner began with a good soup, followed by a few treasured slices of jambon d'Ardennes from a distant family farm which the old couple had treasured for just such an occasion. Then came the main dish—good, tender beef done in a red wine sauce, with new potatoes and aubergines. And to round it off came a dish I had never tried before—fried eggs bedded in a thick, rich tomato *purée*. That good French couple pressed me to eat until I thought I would bust, and finished by apologizing for their failure to complete the meal with *crêpes suzette*. The meal was accompanied by a very pleasant white wine, and capped with a good brandy. I was glad that I had thought to bring some coffee and sugar, which was what Madame had dreamed of for years. So this was starving France, of which we had been warned. But I recognized that this had been a special effort for a special occasion, and that my hosts derived a lot of pleasure from having a guest on such a great day.

As I made my way back to the Press villa I saw the only sign of enemy hostility I ever saw in this sector. A couple of German aircraft made a scalded cat raid on St. Tropez and dropped some anti-personnel bombs. Most of the casualties were civilians, and one French war correspondent was wounded, getting a bomb splinter through his buttocks as he buried his face in the ground.

The next evening another scalded cat raider came over and dropped anti-personnel bombs which fell on or close to the *Catocin* and caused a number of casualties, some fatal.

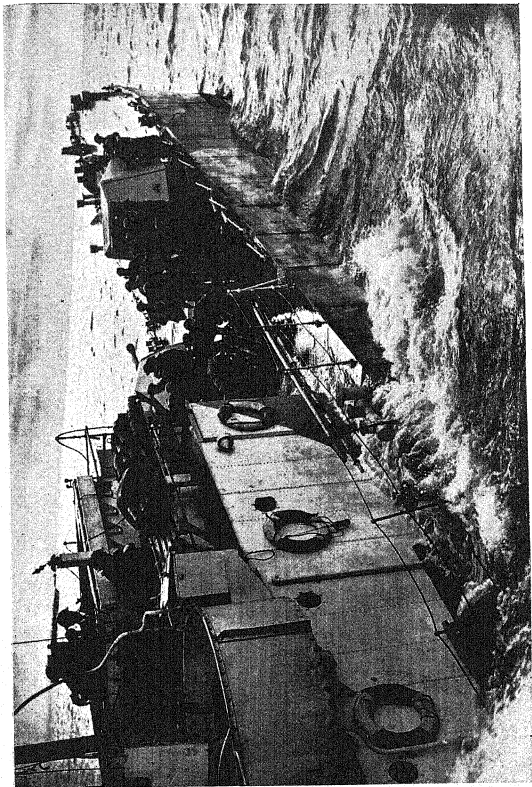
Back at the villa the first evening, I finished my day with a spot more censorship and suggested a line of naval stories to some of the correspondents.

Then to bed—or so I thought. During the day I had scrounged a divan bed from some French neighbours whose home had been hit by a naval shell during the assault. They felt no grudge against us for that. They were liberated and that is all that mattered to them. The people of southern France certainly won my profound admiration for their courage, courtesy and hospitality, and corrected a lot of poor impressions I had acquired in North Africa and Corsica.

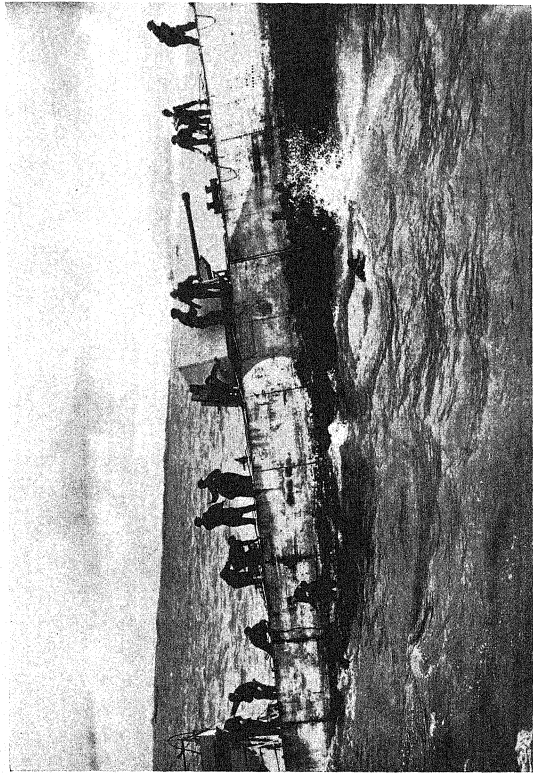
So off I went to my divan which was under a tree in the garden. I was drifting off to sleep when I found the great snag in these comfortable new quarters of ours. Ants. They swarmed everywhere. I soon found myself tickling and itching all over—and I mean all over. Have you ever had armies of ants marching and counter-marching on your tummy? It is maddening. I stood up and brushed off the invaders as well I could. Then I tried to sleep again, after shifting the divan to another tree. No luck. By midnight I was raving crazy. I would have poured petrol over myself and set it on fire at the slightest provocation. I hunted all over that damned villa for a corner free of ants. They were everywhere, upstairs and downstairs, inside and outside. Armies and armies of them, marching backwards and forwards in a thoroughly inane way. Why the hell couldn't they go to sleep like everybody else. And why should they pick on me. I slapped at one lone raider still roaming over my buttocks. Other people seemed to be able to sleep. Apparently, as far as the ants were concerned, I was target for tonight. All over that house I roamed—and then I had a brainwave. The bath, a big capacious bath. Nobody else had thought of using it as a bed. They were sleeping on the floor and light stretcher beds all over the villa. They were sleeping in the garden and in tents. But nobody had thought of the bath. From time to time during the next two or three nights, a messenger would haul me out of my bath in the wee small hours to do a spot of censorship. But I did get some sleep.

Each day more and more correspondents were fetching up at the villa, British, American and French. There was a constant coming and going. Correspondents chasing off to the front in jeeps. Invitations were issued to join an armoured column which was to go crashing off into the blue in an effort to reach Grenoble. On the second day there arrived the correspondents who had dropped inland with the air-borne troops. That is what correspondents do. They get well paid for it, but they certainly earn it. One of these correspondents, a British journalist, was cursing blue blazes. He had jumped with his typewriter slung around his neck. As his parachute brought him up with a jerk, the line holding his typewriter had broken, and it had gone on down ahead of him. He never even found the remains.

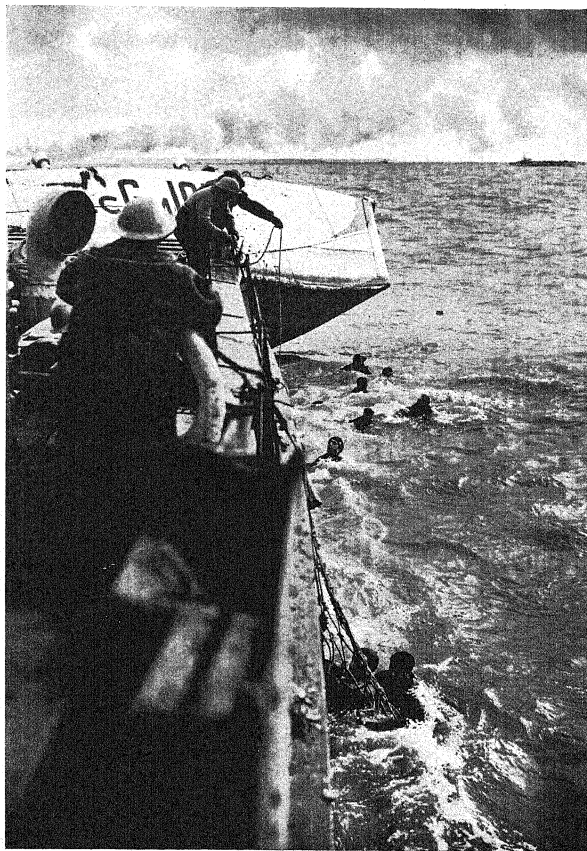
The parachute boys brought some of their silk parachutes with them, great sheets of pure silk mottled green and brown in camouflage



DEATH OF A LANDING CRAFT (GUN): Struggle to save one of the L.C.G. hit by German batteries on Walcheren Island in a close-range gun duel, when the support Squadron took heavy punishment to protect the assault troops.

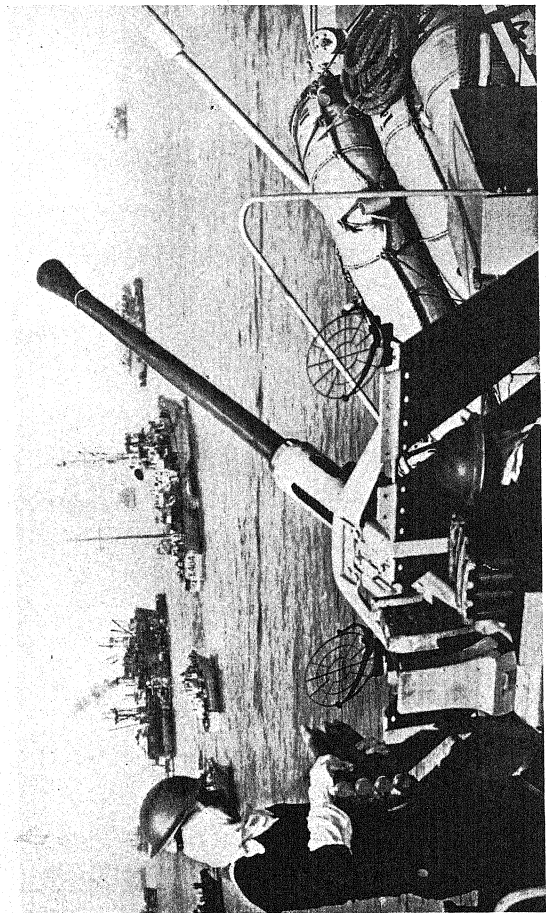


"ABANDON SHIP": Ship's company obey that tragic order, "Abandon Ship", as Landing Craft (Gun) poised for her last plunge. Smoke in background is from the battle ashore.



RESCUED Small Landing Craft (Infantry) saving survivors from the lost Landing Craft (Gun).





BEACH-HEAD: Bofors A.A. gun covers shipping unloading supplies in the Normandy invasion.

shades. Immediately the whole Press camp went to work with scissors and everyone was wearing a smart silk scarf.

So it went on for five days, censoring and chasing the *Catoclin* round the bay twice a day. In between times I wandered into Ste. Maxime to talk with the locals. On my second visit I had a most pathetic meeting with a very old Frenchman. I was standing in the small market-place, smoking, waiting for one of the lads to collect his laundry from a *blanchisserie*.

A man who must have been about eighty years old tottered up to me and offered his hand. I shook hands and gave him a cigarette. With tears in his eyes, he took my hand again, and said earnestly and with a great solemn dignity:

"Thank you, thank you, *mon commandant*. Thank you. Now I am happy. Now I can die. Now I can die a Frenchman. I have been so afraid to die, so afraid that I would die while the Boche was here. But now I am content. I can die—a Frenchman."

And then he turned and tottered off up the street. I felt tears in my own eyes. I turned to a young Frenchman who had watched this little incident, and asked him about the dignified old fellow who had just left me. From the details I got I wrote a *conte*, which, for one reason and another, I have never tried to publish. Here it is—the story of a Frenchman.

The distant rumble of waggon wheels, and, closer, the tramp of marching feet. These were the sounds which woke François Guibert (the name is purposely fictitious) from his fretful sleep. Familiar sounds they were in these days, but never the less hateful. The sound of the "sale Boche".

Monsieur Guibert lay staring into the darkness of his lonely bedroom behind the little shop which was now his sole link with life. For the past six months he had slept but little, and eaten sparingly of his meagre rations. It was very lonely now, very lonely. Night after night he lay there in the darkness, thinking back over six months to that horrible night when Marie had died of pneumonia. How her will had prolonged the agony of her frail, aged body. For Marie had wanted desperately to live. Not that life in these days was to be greatly treasured, life under the hell of the filthy Boche. Yet Marie had fought with pitiful desperation to live, only to see the Day of Liberation, to see the hated Hun driven forth, to be free as a citizen of her beloved France once more, to be a true Frenchwoman again.

How often, in those weeks before she died, had François and Marie, lying side by side in the great old bed, staring into the darkness, talked in whispers of the one ambition left to them. Then the tramp of German jackboots in the street outside, a patrol on its rounds, might force from Marie a little moan. Surely the Day of Glory must come soon. Surely God would not allow this anguish, this crucifixion of a nation, to continue much longer.

Yet Marie's prayers had not availed. The local records showed that Marie Guibert, aged 75, had died in the Riviera town of Ste. Felice, on the night of February 24, 1944. In dying, however, she had bequeathed to François the duty of living for the Day of Glory.

That is why, through six heart-searing months of loneliness, François Guibert had clung so fiercely to life, to life which now had only one object. The days were desolate enough, the good God himself knew. The poor and scanty food was completely tasteless to him, but he ate it as a duty, in order to live, in order to survive. No longer was the tall, gaunt and grey figure of Monsieur François Guibert to be seen in the streets of Ste. Felice-sur-Mer. And it was missed by many a citizen. François had long been like a landmark in Ste. Felice. The town was proud of its oldest citizen who, at the age of eighty, still carried himself so proudly.

In these days François Guibert never ventured forth from his little haberdashery shop. He feared that the sight of the strutting Boche might kill him, choke him with rage. And he had his duty, to France and to Marie, to remember. Kindly neighbours brought him the pittance of food which was his share. Throughout the daylight hours they would find him sitting there in his barren little shop, with its almost empty shelves, staring into space. Always they tried to cheer him a little with the latest whispered news from the outside world, with the words of truth gleaned at the risk of life. And, through the long hours of waiting, François pondered over these faint words of promise from "the outside", words which nourished that desperately thin flame which burned within him.

But now for him the nights were sheer torture. "I must not die. I must not die. Not yet, please God. Not yet." The simple words ran like a refrain through his mind, as he tossed in the big lonely bed.

Thrice in his lifetime had the bestial German Juggernaut rolled over his beloved France. 1870. 1914. And now, worst of all, 1940. Each time it had taken a heavy toll of the Guibert family. As he lay in that terrifying darkness, which seemed to close round him like a shroud, François reviewed the roll of honour of his family. "*Mort pour la Patrie.*" And, at the end of the long list, his thoughts turned towards Pierre, last of his grandsons. Since the cataclysm of 1940 there had been no word of Pierre. Perhaps he had escaped to England. Perhaps he was even now with the proud French Army gathering in North Africa for the Day of Glory. Or perhaps he lay in some unmarked grave far away to the north, mown down, lost, forgotten in the chaos of 1940. If that were true, then he, François, was the last of his line. He must, must live for the day of liberation. He, François Guibert, must not die in slavery.

In the lonely, oppressive blackness of the night François lay and listened to the sound of marching feet and the rumble of waggon wheels.

Perhaps there was a new note now in the tramp of the conqueror. Or did he but imagine it? For the past few days there had been a strange new tingle in the air, a mysterious feeling of expectancy. The enemy

seemed more jumpy. Was he moving his troops about more—or was that merely a thought born of foolish hope?

From mouth to mouth ran the whisper of heavy air raids on Toulon and Marseilles away to the west. Night after night François had listened, thrilling to the drone of aircraft and to the distant thud of bombs shattering the harbour area of Toulon not far along the coast. Perhaps Pierre had managed to become a pilot. Perhaps he was up there in the dome of the night. Tonight there was a great droning in the skies. Was this the prelude to the Day of Glory? Lulled by the drone of the bombers, François drifted back into his fitful sleep.

It was still dark when François Guibert awoke into pandemonium. His house, his room, his bed, shuddered in the darkness. For the moment he was cold and stiff with fear. Again came that shattering roar from seaward, then a distant whining. Another deep, booming explosion and again his bed shuddered to the earthquake detonation of a naval broadside.

Gradually Monsieur Guibert ceased to tremble. Fear flowed from him. And, like a revelation, hope flooded his whole being, his feeble emaciated body, his mind, his heart, his innermost soul. François Guibert prayed, and a great peace descended upon him.

Time after time the house rocked to the explosions. Monsieur Guibert lay there without fear, listening to the pounding of the enemy strong-points on either side of Ste. Felice. Now he could detect the German guns opening up in reply. He knew where these were, and listened anxiously for their sharper bark. One after another they grew silent. He smiled happily. Still the roar of gunfire came from seaward in great waves of sound. Still his house shuddered to the earthquake detonations of those great shells. But François Guibert knew no fear. The good God would not let him die now, not at the moment of triumph. His lips moved silently.

"Marie, Marie, beloved! The Day of Glory has arrived, and I live to see it. Praise be to God. Now I may die happy. Now I may die a Frenchman."

But what was he, he François Guibert, doing just lying there? He must be up and doing. He must do something. The Day of Glory was here. Sounds of running feet in the road below drew him from his bed. A distant rifle shot. A faint stutter of German machine-guns. Monsieur Guibert scrambled from his bed, and drew the heavy curtain so that he might look out upon the new-born world over which the glorious dawn was breaking.

In the street below him one of those loathed figures in field-grey uniform pedalled furiously past on a bicycle. Ah, if he, François Guibert, only had a gun—a rifle, a revolver, a sporting gun. The fleeing cyclist was followed by an Army waggon in which the driver, dimly visible in his field-grey, lashed madly at the fear-crazed horses.

François Guibert stood at the bedroom window like a man in a trance. Dimly he saw the great flashes of the guns. Dully he heard the thundering explosions. Tears streamed down his gaunt cheeks. At last—at last! The dawn—the dawn of the Day of Glory.

Still he stood, expectantly, waiting for one little thing. Ah—there it was at last. A man in uniform appeared at the end of the street. He was carrying a tommy-gun and keeping close to the buildings as he moved cautiously forward. But his was not the hated field-grey. His was the olive-drab of the American soldier.

François Guibert came slowly to a salute—the salute he had learned as a young conscript so many, many years ago. His lips murmured soundlessly.

"My liberator, I thank you, thank you from the deeps of my heart and soul. Now I may die—now I may die, die a Frenchman."

. . . . .

That is the deep impression which the tall, gaunt, stooped and aged gentleman of Ste. Maxime had made upon me. I wrote that impression by the light of a lantern on the same evening.

. . . . .

Now the invasion was beginning to pall. But not as much as American rations. They are all nice and exciting for a start, but after a while I find myself longing for a good tin of corned cow. And coffee—coffee. Morning, noon and night. Oh, for a cup of "char". It became a terrible thirst, a thirst for tea.

By this time the tank landing craft, British and American, were busy running a ferry service from ship to shore. And not far from the villa was a landing beach. And, sure enough, there were a row of tank landing craft with the White Ensign flying. Perhaps I might find "Pat" among this lot. No luck. But I chased on board the first of them.

"Hullo, sir? What can we do for you?" the young Commanding Officer greeted me.

"Just looking for some old friends, old boy. Know where Lieutenant Pattinson has got to?"

"I believe he's round on Camel Beach. Certainly not in these parts."

"Oh well . . ." I turned to go.

"Sorry we can't offer you a drink, sir. We're right out. No Scotch—no gin—nothing."

"Thanks, old son, but I'm really not interested in Scotch at present. There is one thing, though—if I might scrounge."

"What's that?"

"Just a good strong cup of char."

"A cup of tea?"

"Yes, that's all I'm craving for—just a cup of tea, real tea. My

tonsils are damned near awash with American coffee. I'm attached to an American outfit ashore."

The young English officer had a good laugh over that, while he waited for the pot of tea to be made. We sat in his tiny, hot wardroom, smoking and talking about the invasion. He had been at Sicily, Salerno, Anzio and Elba—so he knew something about invasions.

"Nicest invasion I've ever attended," he said. "Just a piece of cake. I haven't seen a shot fired in anger this time. And all home comforts ashore here. Good place the 'L'ermitage'."

Then a rating brought in the tea. It tasted like nectar.

After that I paid regular visits to the landing beach to beg cups of tea from British tank landing craft. Always it was the same old formula whenever I boarded a different L.C.T.

"Awfully sorry, old boy—not a drop of drink—no Scotch."

"To hell with Scotch. But can I have a good strong cup of tea?"

Now that the naval side of the invasion was dying away to a job of ferrying in troops and supplies by L.C.I. and L.C.T., with a spot of cruiser and destroyer bombardment farther along the coast near the quickly moving front lines, I had some leisure to take a closer view of this war. By this time the Americans were spreading towards Nice, while on the other flank the French were probing towards Toulon.

On the receipt of a premature report that Cannes had been captured, an American Air Force man and myself set out for that part by jeep. We wanted to help "liberate" Cannes. That sounded a good place to "liberate" some wine, and perhaps some silk stockings. We were well equipped with "invasion francs", some of the phoniest-looking money I have ever seen. It was printed in vivid colours, with a glaring tricolour on one side. Had I been a Frenchman, I would have shied at the sight of these cigar coupons masquerading as money.

That drive along the lovely coast road had some interesting side-lights. There was one terrific patch of devastation in open country just beyond our landing beaches. A few beautiful villas in this area had been wrecked for all time, though the main weight of explosive had fallen on open land.

There was one patch which showed the terrifying effect of a barrage from a rocket craft. Here the earth was churned up like a Wellsian picture of the dead surface of the moon. Trees were mangled to mere stumps. A horrific feeling of death hung over the area. Any Germans who were in this area when that packet arrived must have had a real foretaste of hell.

Farther along was a great German coastal gun, its long barrel pointing drunkenly skywards. A big shell from a cruiser or battleship had knocked that one out for good.

Miles on, near Frejus, where the retreating enemy had blown a bridge, we saw on the beach one of death's toys. It was a specimen of

the miniature tanks packed with explosives and guided by radio which the enemy had previously sent into the Allied lines at Anzio. Lying there on the golden beach, it looked as though some lucky child had left it lying there. We stopped to stare, but not to touch.

In Frejus there was a big crowd in the town square. Everyone seemed mighty excited. We asked what it was all about. Gloatingly some local citizens told us of a little drama which had just been played there.

Three women, locally notorious for associating with Germans, had been brought to the town square and had their heads shaven to the accompaniment of hoots and jeers from the crowd. To us who had not suffered under the German heel, this seemed a repulsive example of mob anger. Yet it was one of the sights of the Riviera at that time. In this case one of the women, after being released, had tried to knife a gendarme. She had been shot dead. Which, thought the locals, was all to the good. This was a terrifying peep at the spirit which the Germans had bred throughout Europe in their few years of triumph. If feeling were so bitter here in southern France, which had not known the full horrors of occupation, what must it be like in Czechoslovakia and Poland.

On we rolled through St. Raphael, which was the most damaged town I saw along this coast. This very attractive seaside resort had collected quite a few bombs and shells. But now the order of the day seemed to be business as usual with a smile.

Through St. Raphael and heading for Cannes. But we never got there. Round a corner an American military policeman waved us to a stop.

"Where you going, sir?"

"Cannes," explained my Air Force companion.

"Well, sir, you'd better get yourself a tank instead of this jeep. The boys aren't in there yet. The Kraut's making a bit of a fight for it."

"Where's the front line?"

"Just around the next bend. As you get round that the Heiny gunners have got you in their sights."

And sure enough we could hear some firing not far ahead, and could see another jeep sheltering against the face of the cliff this side of the next bend. Cannes—we had had it. We would not have the pleasure of liberating that pleasant city. Might as well get back to our headquarters.

Next day I joined a British jeep party for a run to the other end of the front, the French end, thrusting towards Toulon by way of the narrow coastal plain. There were four of us on that excursion. Vaughn Thomas, another British correspondent and myself, with Captain Mike Davis, an Army conducting officer, driving. We had some idea that the front line was in the vicinity of La Londe, a village to the east of Hyères. As we drew near the area we kept a keen look-out, and stopped

from time to time to speak to the locals. With the front line so tenuous and shifting rapidly, it would have been quite easy to run right through it and finish up in enemy territory.

One civilian we stopped to question was sweating his way towards La Londe on a pushbike. We offered him some cigarettes and talked with him a while. He was a doctor from Hyères who had taken refuge with his wife at his brother-in-law's estate back along the road we had come. Now he wanted to be back into Hyères as soon as it was liberated. He proudly showed us an ancient-looking revolver he had secretly cherished throughout the period of German occupation. Now he hoped to square some scores should he catch up with the fighting. In parting he asked us to look into his brother-in-law's place on the way back, and tell his wife that he would be spending the night at La Londe as the way to Hyères was not yet open. We promised.

Now we were getting near the fighting. Hidden in thickets to the left of the road we could hear French batteries plugging away at the enemy. Just then we came up with an ancient-looking motor-lorry from which flaunted a large, faded Union Jack. We stopped to investigate, and found it manned by a British Major with a team of soldiers and ratings. I had thought I was the only specimen of British officer in this area, but I had forgotten the F.O.O.s. These are the link between bombarding warships and the Army ashore. Their full title is Forward Observation Officer. They establish an observation post near the front line to direct the fire of cruisers and battleships on the enemy strongpoints which are holding up the troops. The naval ratings operate the radio for this purpose. We got the latest information about this sector of the front from the F.O.O. on the ancient lorry. The front line was about two miles ahead on the outskirts of La Londe. There was nothing much to see. Just then another Press jeep, with an American party on board, came along the road from La Londe.

"Nothing much to see up there, fellers," was their report. "The French aren't rushing it on this sector. They've got to wait for other sectors to move forward."

It was then that I fully realized the sound common sense of Vaughn Thomas. You would expect a battle-hound like Vaughn to insist on seeing whatever fighting was going. The man who had made the first and finest broadcast from a bomber over Berlin in the midst of a very sticky raid—the man who had stayed the whole time at Anzio and seemed to enjoy it. But Vaughn was no stupid fire-eater. He it was who suggested that, as there was obviously nothing to see down the road, we might as well be getting back in good time for the promised talk by senior American generals at the Press villa that evening.

On the way back we stopped at a picturesque little inn right in the heart of a wood. Not much luck. The advancing French forces had just about drunk that place dry. A few French officers were about to mop up the last bottle of wine as we came in. When we asked for a drink, the patron was full of apologies. He told us the situation, with a million regrets. We were ten thousand times welcome, and it broke



his heart to say that not a drop of wine remained in his cellars. Just then one of the French officers got up, and brought us the last bottle of wine which had just been opened for his party. Those French officers would not take no for an answer. They had already had one bottle, and it was their great privilege to insist that we drank this one. In the end we compromised by all taking short rations to drink a toast to victory.

A few miles farther along the road we identified the estate "Le Noyer", which our cyclist friend had asked us to visit. It was a large house set far back from the road among a wide stretch of vineyards. So, under a flag-decked archway and up the drive, we drove to deliver our message. Frankly we hoped for a bottle of wine to quench our steadily mounting thirsts. But we hardly expected the welcome we did get. This estate, owned by M. Jean Marcel, was a show-place of the region of Bormes les Mimosas, and famed for its vin rose. For an hour we sat on a leafy verandah drinking the best wines M. Marcel could produce. We were waited upon hand and foot by M. Marcel, two men friends and three charming ladies. Peaches and grapes were produced. It was with difficulty that we could tear ourselves away from this hospitable house and race back to Ste. Maxime in time for the evening conference. Bottles of vin rose and a basket of peaches were thrust into the jeep, and our hosts insistently repeated that we should come that way again soon and stay longer.

I asked our host what things he most needed after these years of occupation. He was reluctant to appear to be asking for anything, but I insisted.

"Well then—perhaps a razor blade, or a little soap. And if there perhaps might be a little coffee to spare, that would be very, very welcome."

I made a vow that he should have what he wanted, as soon as I could get that way again.

That evening I had the brainwave which put me in the stickiest corner I ever hope to experience, and eventually brought me back to M. Marcel's hospitable house. It was like this.

The war correspondents were now entirely concentrated upon the job being done by the rapidly advancing armies ashore. Naval publicity was at a discount. The bombardment jobs by the cruisers in support of the land forces got their daily mention in official communiques, and that was all. My landing-craft friends were doing their essential but unspectacular job without any limelight, ferrying French troops—Goums, Senegalese, white forces, tanks and mules ashore in the Tropez area. Naval censorship had dwindled away to nothing, and I had no good story to "sell" the correspondents.

I racked my brains for an idea. Ah, there it was. The fall of Toulon, the great naval base to the westwards, was the next big story on the list. There was a naval angle. The first warship to enter Toulon when it fell. The capture from the land side would be a French job, but the seawards angle would be British and American.

Over the brandy that evening I consulted half a dozen British

and American correspondents, particularly agency men. If I got through to Toulon with the leading forces, and obtained stories from the first British and American ships to enter the shattered harbour amidst the wreckage of the scuttled French Fleet, would it interest them. I would be sure to get them a list of names and hometowns of officers and ratings in these ships. Yes, it certainly would suit these correspondents right down to the ground. And it was just my ticket, for I expected some of my landing-craft friends to be first into Toulon. I liked doing stories about them.

The same evening I got hold of a young French officer who was doing Press liaison work for his Army. He was enthusiastic about the idea of having a British naval officer with the French forces.

"We've just got the right unit for you," he explained in perfect English. "The Fusiliers Marins. Ever heard of them?"

I was afraid I had not.

"The Fusiliers Marins are sailors serving ashore with the Army. They are all volunteers from the French Navy and Merchant Marine, and are also genuine Desert Rats. They took part in the Desert campaign, and are now running the Recce Regiment of the First French Army. One of their squadrons of recce cars is sure to be the first unit into Toulon."

"That sounds fine to me," I commented.

"You're just in time, too," said the Frenchman. "Tomorrow morning a bunch of correspondents are going to General Delattre de Tassigny's headquarters inland. Come along with us and I'll fix it up."

## CHAPTER XI

### INTO BATTLE

NEXT morning a cavalcade of jeeps assembled early at the villa to take a group of correspondents to General Delattre de Tassigny's headquarters at Pierrefeu.

That was a ride worth making for the scenery alone, way up into the lovely wooded hills behind the Riviera. I must admit that at times our French driver made my heart jump a bit at tricky points on the winding mountain roads.

At last we got to the main road leading to Pierrefeu. It was crowded with troops and vehicles, flowing inland. With an appointment fixed for 10 a.m. the Press jeeps pressed on as fast as possible, skating in and out among columns of tanks and trucks, racing ahead through clouds of biting white dust which seared my eyeballs. Along the route we passed columns of Goums trudging forward with their mules. They

were heading for the rugged country behind Toulon, which was just the sort of terrain over which they enjoyed fighting. This was my first close-up of those killers. They certainly looked the part. Fierce, hawk-like faces, shaven heads, set off by the strange striped uniforms. Here and there were faces to delight an artist.

In the midst of one column rolled a motor-lorry packed high with baggage. And on top of the baggage clung half a dozen Goum women. For the Goums always take a few women along with them—a bordello on wheels. To them life is a matter of fighting and amorous dalliance.

By the time we reached Pierrefeu we looked like a collection of ghosts wrapped in shrouds of grey dust. As best we could we dusted ourselves down, and sat under the trees waiting for General de Tassigny. He arrived in a cloud of dust, a trumpet shrilling and sentries presenting arms. The correspondents gathered to be introduced.

General Delattre de Tassigny is a little above medium height, well built, lithe and with a sparkling personality.

We were all struck with his charm and grace as he shook hands all round. There is about him a certain theatricality which the English generally associate with their Gallic comrades-in-arms. It is a matter of liveliness and fire characteristic of the French. I could not help thinking—a *comédie-française* general. That was a most inadequate expression of his charm and mannerisms, and I hope that my French colleagues will not take offence at the expression. What I am driving at is a certain *je-ne-sais-quoi* of Gallic liveliness. There was nothing affected about Delattre de Tassigny, who has proven himself a most able soldier.

That morning he was bubbling over with excitement. The news was good. He led us into a large room where a few maps already lay on a table, and lost no time in explaining to us, from his latest dispatches, the situation along the French front. Fortunately most of us spoke fairly fluent French, though an interpreter stood by to help over awkward corners.

"I must admit," said the General, "that I have been taking, and am taking, a serious risk in this operation. As fast as my troops are landed, they are rushed forward and thrown into battle. We are now strung out thinly, without adequate armour, but all goes well. The whole point is that I must not give the Boche breathing space to make a stand on a line, and reorganize. The risk is worth it."

"But when will Toulon fall, *mon General*?" asked one correspondent.

Delattre de Tassigny was full of optimism. With the aid of the maps he explained the situation.

"General Montsabert [it sounded like that] has made a magnificent forced march to encircle Toulon. He is coming down this road from the west, and Toulon is encircled. It will fall like a ripe plum." *Tout certainement va-ed bien.*

At the end of that talk I had visions of a triumphant ride into Toulon with the Fusiliers Marins, waving bravely to the liberated populace. Digger the Liberator. Bolivar ran second. I have never quite forgiven

Delattre de Tassigny for giving me that hyper-optimistic impression at Pierrefeu that morning.

After the conference with the General, my French friend took me away on my own to his Officers' Mess in the adjacent barracks. The more I met French officers in this part of the world, the more I kept revising my opinions in their favour. That luncheon at Pierrefeu finally converted me from a Francophobe to a Francophil. Over some very adequate red wine we ate and chatted. A good gang these fighting Frenchmen. I had been judging the French so far by their base wallahs and opportunist civilians. After all there was not much to pick and choose between the British, Americans and French when it came to professional base wallahs. I had heard the Fighting Forty-Fifth make fiercer remarks about their "rear echelon" good-time-Charlies than I could have thought up. I suppose the French felt the same about their *ronds de cuir*. But the fighting Frenchman is all right in every way. If only the governance of the world could be left to real fighting ex-servicemen we might get somewhere.

At any rate my young French friend and his colleagues got somewhere that day in promoting Anglo-French solidarity.

Lunch was over, and we were away in the jeep to find the Langlois Squadron of the Fusiliers Marins. They were the lads who were going to take me on the triumphant entry into Toulon—or so I thought. If I could have foreseen the events of the next few days I doubt whether I would have gone on. But I trusted in the optimism of General Delattre de Tassigny. And I suppose that what happened to the Langlois Squadron before the week was out, was a very minor incident of warfare to a man who was running a whole campaign on a big scale. Toulon will fall—"comme une prune mûre"—Like hell.

Why should it? After all, the French had protected the great naval base with some mighty fortifications, and the Germans must have long since converted these to deal with thrusts from inland as well as from the sea.

Anyway—for better or for worse—I was off with my French friend to join the Langlois Squadron. La Londe was their latest position. Another dusty jeep ride through magnificent wooded hill country, and down to the coastal plain, into La Londe. There we began our hunt for the Langlois Squadron. Two French matelots, in their distinctive rig with a cap surmounted by a red pom-pom, gave us the necessary directions. A few minutes later we were rolling up a short drive flanked by pine trees to a brick farmhouse.

Tucked away under the pine trees were the recce cars and armoured cars of the unit, and on all sides were the naval uniforms of the Fusiliers Marins.

A dark, serious French officer, Commandant Henri Langlois, from whom the squadron took its name, came forward to meet us. He had joined the Fusiliers Marins as a volunteer to the call of de Gaulle way back in Egypt, where, in peacetime, he had been a pilot on the Suez Canal.

Certainly, he would be glad to take me to Toulon. Soon I was being introduced all round. The young junior officers flocked around to welcome me to their unit. They showed me the cars of the unit, and took me to the roof of the farmhouse to get a bird's-eye view of the enemy positions on the other side of the village of La Londe.

They were just getting their American scout cars ready for a further forward move to probe the enemy defences in the direction of Hyères.

One of the first things which struck me was the very suitable nature of these rangy little land craft for men who wore the French naval uniform, with its distinctive red pom-pom on top of the blue Tam-o'-Shanter cap. With machine-guns poking out on either side these scout cars were rather like support landing craft on wheels, both in square box-like appearance and in task. What more suitable craft for these young naval officers and ratings. And, as in landing craft, youth was a notable characteristic of the crews of these land craft too.

While we waited for the order to move forward through La Londe and out along the straight flat road towards Hyères, Commandant Langlois told me something of the history of the regiment of the Fusiliers Marins.

The Fusiliers Marins had been formed way back in Egypt. At first, only a battalion strong, they had fought in that sorry campaign of Syria against their own Vichyite compatriots. Next they had taken part in the great desert campaign. General de Gaulle's First French Army had needed an anti-aircraft corps, and who more adaptable for this job than the sailors turned soldiers, the Fusiliers Marins. As ack-ack gunners they had taken a big part in the fierce desert battle of Bir Hakeim, standing up to the great German onslaught with its overwhelming odds.

Eventually they fell back to Egypt with the rest of the Allied forces in those black weeks before El Alamein. Then Monty struck. The tide of battle turned. Once more the Fusiliers Marins, now true Rats du Desert in their own right, were in the triumphal advance across the desert to Tunisia.

In North Africa many new recruits flocked to their standard, and the Fusiliers Marins changed duties again. Now, a regiment strong, they blossomed forth as the Recce Regiment of the Fighting French First Army. As a Recce Regiment they had fought through the Italian campaign, distinguishing themselves in the battles of the Garigliano River and Monte Falcone.

Now they were fighting on their native soil, and nothing could stop them.

One officer produced a small silk standard on which were embroidered the battle honours of the Fusiliers Marins, with the strange motto, "*Felon, Garde-toi*" ("Watch out, Felon"). I asked the meaning of this strange phrase.

"Ah," he explained, "those men of Vichy once described us all as felons, crooks, criminals. We were proud to be called crooks by those criminals of Vichy."

They were explaining the story of the regiment to me when a senior officer arrived on the scene. Captain Le Morcier, Commanding Officer

of the regiment. I was introduced, and we talked about the earlier days of the war. Soon we found a link. He had been the Commanding Officer of the corvette *Lobelia* on Atlantic convoy escort way back in the first part of 1941, when I had been doing similar duty in the anti-submarine trawler *Arab*. We talked away about those old days in Western Approaches, and he invited me to be his guest at dinner when the Fusiliers Marins assembled in Toulon a few days hence. Then he went into a huddle with Commandant Langlois, and so on after that came the order: "*A voiture!*" Powerful engines roared and the dust clouds rose as we bumped our way out of the pinewood.

I had been assigned to the car of the squadron's second-in-command, Captain François Tilly, of Morlaix, Finistere. He was a square-built stocky man, about my own height and age, with a constant twinkle in his blue eyes, a jovial companion. I found him a good man in a tight corner, for he never got rattled, and appeared quite unconcerned and phlegmatic when all hell was apopping.

Soon the squadron's armoured cars and the recce vehicles were "steaming in line ahead" through the main street of La Londe while the local people waved to us. On the other side of the village we emerged on to a straight ribbon of road running across a stretch of flat green plain which was bordered by the sea. Away to the left there, about half a mile across the fields, were a row of houses facing on the beach. It was only later that I discovered that these houses had been converted into concrete blockhouses by the Germans, who were still holding out there with Oerlikons and machine-guns, although they had been by-passed by the main French advance. On our right, in a field, we passed a carefully screened battery of French field guns plugging away at the enemy positions this side of Hyères.

As we started down this road, Captain Tilly remarked to the driver of our car: "*Ici nous sommes allumés.*"

"*Allumés? Allumés?*" That was a new word to me.

"*Pardon. Qu'est-que c'est, cette mot—'allumé'?*"

Captain Tilly explained. Along this road we came under the observation and within range of the enemy gunners. They were likely to start cracking at us immediately. All at once, as I sat in the comfortable bucket seat next to the driver, well down below the armour-plated side, and looking through the slot of the armour-plate windscreen, I felt as though all this protective metal were as thin as tissue paper.

Then I noticed the infantry, mainly black Senegalese, crouching in the ditches and behind hedges we were passing. Then it dawned on me. This was the front line all right, and we were still moving forward. Just then we turned off that straight road, and bumped our way along a dirt road leading off at right angles and running in among some trees. This seemed better. At least we were not so damned "*allumés*"—and the Hun had not opened up on us as we came. A few hundred yards more and we rounded the corner of a barn to run into the square courtyard of an old farm. The farm itself nestled at the foot of a steep hill which stood between us and the enemy lines.

The large two-storey farmhouse, which had been knocked about by shells or bombs, stood on one side of the courtyard. Opposite it were sheds and outhouses. At the other end was a great barn-like building which had been a sort of warehouse and wine store. Around the courtyard grew tall palm trees and a few hefty bluegums which reminded me strongly of Australia—and I wished I were there.

We dismounted and hung about for a while. Some of the farm workers offered me a welcome drink of cloudy, new wine. A young officer of the squadron invited me to climb the hill with him to an artillery observation post and take a look at the enemy lines. Not that there was much to see, except the bursts of the French battery's shells on the flat landscape.

At last there came a jeep bringing the orders. For the night we would stay at that farm. We unpacked our rations, and began to eat. I sat there talking with the chief petty officer and four ratings who formed the crew of Captain Tilly's car to which I now belonged. There we sat slapping at our faces and necks all the time to drive away the clouds of mosquitoes which became my constant nightmare for the next few days.

Compared with the notorious North African mosquitos, these Riviera insects were mere midgits, and, I was assured, they did not carry malaria. But they were the savagest, most numerous and most persistent mosquitoes I have ever encountered. In the heat of the day they didn't bother us much, but as the sun dropped towards the west they came swarming from their siesta to seek whom they might devour. Like the ants, they seemed to pick on me. Somebody produced a bottle of anti-mosquito lotion, and I annointed my face, neck, hands, arms and knees. It was all to no avail. Those mosquitoes seemed to lap up the lotion and ask for more. They were thirsty, and had not read the label on the bottle. So I pulled a switch off a tree and sat there munching my K rations and slap-slapping constantly at my face and legs.

The Chief Petty Officer of our car, who had taken me under his wing as a distinguished guest, brought me a mug of good red wine to wash down the K rations, and stood talking about the regiment and what a good time he would show me when we reached Toulon.

Toulon. Toulon. When? Perhaps tomorrow. Perhaps the next day. Perhaps the day after that. The Fusiliers Marins had waited years for this great occasion. They could wait another day or two.

I will always remember that Chief Petty Officer who, in the next couple of days, became my guide, philosopher or friend. He was a tough little bantam, hardy as they make them, and full of fight. A cheerful little French Cockney was how I thought of him, this five-foot live-wire with the ever-ready grin. Whenever we stopped along the road to Toulon he would fossick around, and generally return with some treasure. Then he would make straight for me, and, with a cracking salute and a broad smile, ask:

"*Mon commandant. Voulez-vous du cognac? Je viens de trouver du cognac,*" or "*Mon commandant. Voulez-vous de champagne?*"

Whenever he found anything to eat or drink, he must first offer it to the British guest.

We strolled together to the edge of a vineyard to see what a group of our squadron were looking at in the direction of the sea. There we found a grandstand seat for the war. About three-quarters of a mile away across the fields we could see infantry advancing along the beach towards the blockhouses to winkle out this last German island of resistance. The Germans opened up with Oerlikons and machine-guns. The infantry, looking like dwarfs from this distance, dropped to cover. Then the German gunners seemed to notice our gallery for the first time, and threw a couple of Oerlikon shells across the road in our direction. Maybe they thought that we were spotting for the nearby field battery. We dodged down into a trench.

And right then the Huns got something to take their minds off us. The field battery began to throw shells into that group of blockhouses. We could see hits scored, and fragments flying, but the enemy had done a thorough job in concreting those seaside villas, and it was not until the next day that the Germans got out and fled for the hills.

Now dusk was closing in, and time to look for a place to sleep for the night. I got my blanket and kitbag, and wandered over to the ruined farmhouse. A Senegalese unit was in occupation, and the black soldiers giggled as I spoke to them in my heavily accented French. At last they understood what I wanted. They took me to the room where their own officers were sleeping, and brought me a rough straw palliase. So, pulling the blanket up over my head to ward off the mosquitoes, I was soon asleep.

It was the early hours of the morning when I was awakened by the floor jumping under me. Then there came a second crash away towards the road. I lay there listening while the enemy guns chucked some heavy stuff over. He seemed to be trying to shell the main road and adjacent areas to stop the French bringing up reinforcements under cover of darkness. Time after time the old farmhouse jumped a few inches from its foundations as shells landed a hundred yards or so to right or left. How long this went on I do not know, for I was much too weary to stay awake. Thinking comfortably of that steep hill which stood between us and the enemy gunners, I snuggled closer under my blanket and was soon sleeping again.

After breakfasting on K rations at dawn, we soon were on the move again.

"*Aujourd'hui Toulon?*" No, not today—Perhaps tomorrow—perhaps the next day. Now we were moving only to an adjacent hilltop where the officer commanding the infantry on this sector had set up his command post in one of the chain of fortresses protecting Toulon.

It had been captured about thirty-six hours earlier by French Commandos who had carried out an almost incredible attack. The fort, surrounded by a stout stone wall and protective barbed wire, was perched on top of a hill which ran steep down on all sides. The approach was



by a steep, winding dirt road. In that seemingly impregnable position had been about a hundred well-armed Germans.

Yet some fifty French Commandos had stormed that position, and wiped out the German garrison in fierce hand-to-hand fighting. When the position was won, less than half the French victors remained alive.

I was in time to see a little of their handiwork, for there had not been time yet to bury all the German dead. Those French storm troops had certainly done a thorough job. On one side awaiting burial were Germans with their throats cut from ear to ear or stabbed through the chest and stomach. It was a grim glimpse of death at close quarters.

Deep down in damp, slippery underground passages of the fort we found plenty of German equipment and rations, including some French mineral waters in bottles well chilled by the underground dankness. These we brought up for our own use, together with some cases of German rations which we loaded into the scout car for distribution to the hungry people of Hyères when we got there. As a souvenir the Chief Petty Officer brought me a new German Army pack he had found among the equipment.

Right at the peak of the hill which covered one of the great turrets of the fort, we found a cluster of artillery observation posts. Among these groups I met a British F.O.O. who was directing the fire from an American cruiser standing well off the coast. He explained the position to me.

"See that big place straight ahead," he said, pointing to a large building which stood to one side of the road to Hyères and at the foot of a steep hill a couple of miles away. "That's the Hôtel du Golfe. It dominates the road to Hyères and is holding up the whole works. There are big enemy batteries right up in the hills which my cruiser is looking after, but they're not the real trouble. The Hôtel du Golfe is holding up the whole works in this sector!"

"You'll see that soon," he went on. "The Boche has done a good job with the Hôtel du Golfe. He's lined it throughout with about six foot of concrete, and has it packed with well-protected troops and guns. But the French are going to throw about a thousand shells at it in a minute or so, and then the infantry is going to follow in."

Just then the French battery behind our hill started the bombardment. There was a great crash, and then we heard the shells whispering high over our heads. We stared at the big building ahead, waiting for the fall of shot. There they went—a yellow flash and a gushing cloud of smoke. A bit short and to the left. Soon other batteries joined in, and the shells were whispering over our heads in steady procession. Whispering is the precise word. Shells do not shriek or scream when they are passing high over you like that. They make a strange sighing, whispering sound as though they were sad.

From the hilltop we checked the fall of shot. Over—short—a hit. Now the Hôtel du Golfe could be seen but dimly through a cauldron of smoke which was being constantly punctured by the flashes of more shells falling. At last the bombardment was over and the infantry were moving

to the attack. This should mean that we would be moving soon, so I climbed down to the recce cars on the road near the entrance to the fort.

It was while I was watching some Senegalese wounded being treated at a first-aid post, and wondering at the strange effect of blood on a black skin, like a red sock, that the storm broke. Up the road came a jeep at a terrific rate of knots. It skidded to a stop at our cars, and out jumped a French General who seemed to have gone stark, raving mad. In a torrent of French which was far too fast and shrill for me to catch, he fairly screamed at Commandant Langlois. The Fusiliers Marins stood around grinning sheepishly. Langlois stood at attention and said not a word. The General screamed some more, jumped back in his jeep and drove off, as he had come, in a cloud of dust.

From the General's manner I was convinced that disaster was upon us. I thought of de Tassigny's statement about stringing his men out thin and taking a risk. From our own General's terrific excitement and tone, I thought that he must have discovered that the enemy had a couple of extra divisions in hand and were about to overrun us.

Tilly and Langlois were talking together, so I joined them.

"What's the matter with the General?" I asked as nonchalantly as possible.

"Oh, he's always like that," said Tilly.

"What was he shouting about?" I asked.

"He was only saying that the road to Hyères was now open and we should be getting on fast. So let's get going."

"Regular little thunderstorm he is," I remarked, and Tilly grinned his quiet, imperturbable smile.

I have long since forgotten the name of the General concerned. At the time, to the amusement of the Fusiliers Marins, I christened him General de l'Orage, and that is how I will always remember him.

But now the order was passed—"A la route." We climbed into the recce cars and rolled down the hill back to the farm. In the courtyard were assembled all the vehicles of the squadron, ready to move off.

We were just about to get under way when pandemonium broke loose again. Into the courtyard came tearing a jeep carrying a young officer who was pointing behind him and shouting his head off. All I could catch of his tirade was:

"*Le Boche est ici! Le Boche est ici!*" Everyone started to shout at once. "*Le Boche est ici—le Boche est la.*" They were pointing in all directions. Down the hillside behind us I could see Senegalese soldiers flitting from tree to tree like giant black butterflies—taking shots at some invisible enemy. Orders were shouted. Captain Tilly grabbed a tommy-gun and ran off with a group of Fusiliers to form a defence line at the edge of the vineyard. The recce cars formed a lager at the entrances to the courtyard. As far as I could make out we were surrounded by Germans who had appeared suddenly from nowhere. I again thought of General de Tassigny's statement and cursed my luck. I did not even have a Sten-gun. I groped around in the recce car and found a single-

shot carbine. This was better than nothing, but hardly the weapon to stem a rush of infantry. The Chief Petty Officer was swinging the two machine-guns round to cover the sector of vineyard which we were watching. The driver of the car beside me cocked his tommy-gun, and then lowered the armoured windscreen. There we sat, peering through the slits in the armour for the first glimpse of a German helmet.

"What a damn' fool you are," I mused to myself. "If the worst has happened, as it seems to have done, about the best you can expect is to finish up in a barbed-wire cage. And you didn't really need to be here. To hell with Delattre de Tassigny and his Toulon like a ripe plum. Digger the Liberator looks like being Digger the Corpse or Digger the Prisoner of War any time now. What price a single-shot carbine and no bayonet against a German machine-pistol."

Then I began to think of Gizi and Tessa. I said a silent but mighty fervent prayer. Slit-trench Christianity again. But it helps. And all the time I peered anxiously through that armoured slit for a sign of the enemy.

We had been there about a quarter of an hour when a runner came panting up. It was all right, all over. Nothing to worry about. The Boche had been those troops from the seaside blockhouses. They had apparently got tired of squatting there in isolation, and had made a break for it to try to reach the hills and escape. They had been more scared of us than I was of them. My heart steadied down to a regular beat again.

Five minutes later we formed up and were off along the road to Hyères. As we passed the Hôtel du Golfe we trained our guns on it, just in case an odd sniper or two were still there, but not a shot came. The artillery and infantry had done a good job.

After a roughriding tour to avoid a German minefield at a cross-roads, we rolled into the outskirts of Hyères. Beyond the great military barracks we pulled up to ask some civilians the whereabouts of the enemy. An old man came running out into the road, tears streaming down his face, and offered us a handful of boiled new potatoes. He was sobbing and shouting blessings. Not until later did I discover that the handful of potatoes he had been offering us were practically the whole of his day's ration in this city of hunger. Gently the tough little Chief Petty Officer waved away this offering. Instead he handed the old man a tin of the excellent German meat ration and some biscuit.

"Where is the Boche?" we asked.

The old man was too overwhelmed with emotion to do more than point straight up the road. But other civilians had come up to cheer and welcome us, holding up bottles of wine, and receiving with tears of gratitude our presents of tinned food, biscuits and cigarettes.

"Yes, yes. The Boche is still in the other end of the town. About a mile along this road."

We moved on. Although the enemy were still in town, only a mile away, the populace were out in the street in strength to cheer and wave and throw us kisses. It gave you a grand feeling—a boost. Now we could

hear an eighty-eight cracking, and the rattle of machine-guns. Round a corner and there was the war. On the left-hand side of the road the line of buildings was broken by a large garden with a spiked iron fence. At the other end of the garden, down a slope, were the Germans. They held this section of the main road, about fifty yards, under direct fire from both machine-guns and eighty-eights.

We pulled up just short of this gap, and from time to time came a yellow flash and a sharp crack as an eighty-eight shell burst about twenty feet ahead of us. In between whiles a German heavy machine-gun sprayed the road with gay red tracer bullets. But where we stood the line of buildings protected us. Now and then a jeep ran the gauntlet across this open space, to be followed by a burst of fire from the hidden Hun.

Senegalese soldiers were being moved up to deal with this German hold-up. Doubled up they sprinted across the open space, or crouched down behind the low concrete wall which held the spikes of the garden fence. The armoured car of our squadron edged to one corner of the garden and started to try to knock out the machine-gun nest. Yet, within twenty feet of this shelling and shooting, we had dismounted and were gabbling away to the men, women and children from the houses which were sheltering us from the enemy's fire. With eighty-eight shells flashing and cracking on the edge of the road less than a stone's-throw away, these civilians showed little concern. It seemed strange to be standing on the fringe of this fierce little bit of war talking to a woman with a baby in her arms, and drinking happy toasts with her husband and other members of the family who gathered around. We lost no time in loading them with both German and American rations, for they certainly needed food. Life in Hyères had been very grim for the previous fortnight, and far from easy for many months before that. All they had left was a little treasured wine, but this they thrust upon us eagerly. Now they were almost delirious with happiness. Liberation at last.

"No gas, no electricity and nothing but a few boiled potatoes and a bit of salad to eat for the past two weeks," said the mother with the baby. "There has been no milk for the kiddies for weeks. But now you are here we are happy again."

Another member of the family chimed in:

"Ah, the dirty Boche, we will show you what he did at the finish. They are all up there—laid out for burial. We will show you.

"At the finish some men in civilian clothes came into town pretending to be Vichy secret police. But we knew them by their accents. They were the Boche. They were Gestapo. They rounded up a group of old men, women and children from families whose young men had escaped from town and crept through the lines to tell you about the German positions. They took them out and shot them."

I never got a chance to go to the place where these innocent victims of the German hatred were lying in state, but Tilly and Langlois both saw them, and came back burning with hatred. They told me of it. Yes,

it was perfectly true. Old men, women and tiny children mown down. They had seen the bodies.

While we talked with the people around our scout car, embracing the newcomers and drinking toasts to freedom, it was growing dark. Now the lines of military vehicles stretched back behind our squadron. Tanks came rumbling past to help the black infantry wrinkle out the Hun rearguard with their eighty-eights and machine-guns.

In the darkness we could see a big building up the road blazing. The word came through that it was the maternity hospital on fire, a last act of revenge by the enemy gunners. Now they were evacuating the place, bringing the mothers and babies to safety in jeeps. The jeeps came racing across that dangerous fifty yards, with nurses or soldiers protecting the mothers and babies with their bodies. All got through safely despite savage bursts of machine-gun fire drawn by the racing jeeps.

At last the firing ceased. The Senegalese and tanks had done their job. By now the whole road was packed with fighting vehicles. What were we going to do for the night? Langlois and Tilly went off to find out. A young officer came along in a jeep with the order that we were to stay where we were for the night, sleeping in or beside the scout cars, and move forward at dawn.

A civilian invited me to come up town where a big party was in progress and champagne was flowing. I was about to accept when it dawned on me that this might be plenty dangerous. The British uniform and strongly accented French which had made me the focus of interest as the only Britisher in the liberation of Hyères, might get me into a lot of trouble in the dark. The town was packed with Senegalese, who are simple-minded soldiers, and might easily make a mistake, particularly since the Boche was still so near and some infiltration was not to be ruled out. I did not fancy having my throat cut by an enterprising Senegalese warrior who might make a justifiable mistake he would afterwards regret.

The safest thing for me was to stick close to my companions in the scout car. The Chief Petty Officer disappeared for a while, but I did not pay any attention to that. Then out of the darkness loomed his tiny figure again. Another of those cracking salutes, and he was reporting:

*"Mon commandant, j'ai trouve du cognac. Voulez-vous du cognac?"*

I certainly voulezed some cognac. The night air was chilly, and this was just what the doctor ordered, albeit a bit on the raw and fiery side. One by one the civilians disappeared into their dark houses to rest after such an exciting, joyous day. So at last we of the recce cars began to settle down for the night. From the car I dragged my blanket and a couple of leather cushions, and, with my tin hat as a bolster, and my carbine at my side, I settled down for the night on the footpath. My friend, C.P.O., brought me a nightcap of cognac, and soon I was drifting off to sleep.

*"Hôtel du Trottoir,"* I remarked as a good-night sally. *"Dernier confort. Eau froid du ciel. Eau chaud du Boche."*

The others chuckled sleepily, and soon there was silence in our section.

I was on the verge of sleep when the first of the crashes came. Big stuff. The Germans were throwing it into the town, trying to drop it on this main road. I lay and listened for the next lot. Away in the distance came the sound—boom-boom-boom-boom-boom. A slight pause, and then there was a sound like a couple of express trains racing through the skies. Then, among the buildings behind us, a great crash.

By this time the rest of the lads were sitting up. "What's this lot?" I asked, and the C.P.O. replied, "*Les grandes mortiers.*" He was standing up, and looking around. Then I remembered. Away to the south of Hyères was a peninsula on which German marines, good fighting men, were holding out. They were now shelling Hyères with those big multiple mortars I had heard described as "The Sobbing Sisters".

Three of us scrambled off the pavement on to the cobbles beneath the scout car. That felt a bit safer. I didn't know then that these mortar bricks were fused to scatter fragments at ground level, and felt a lot more comfortable under the car, a very flimsy shelter if you stopped to think of it. Time after time came that distant booming, then the express trains racing through the air and the rending crash among the adjacent buildings. But, squeezing my hip bones between two cobblestones, I managed to get off to sleep again. Wonderful cure for insomnia this open-air life and cognac.

Some hours later I was awakened again by a new kind of explosion. It came from the direction of Toulon, and even at this distance you could feel the giant wave of air which followed the great detonation. As I lay awake there came another and another roaring explosion. Each was preceded by a terrific flash which lit up the western sky. Apparently the enemy were blowing up the arsenal and munition dumps in Toulon. He must be hauling out, if he could get out. So it looked as though we would reach our destination in the morning. With this comforting thought I fell asleep again.

The first glimmer of dawn was showing when the C.P.O. roused me. I crawled from under the car, and saw him standing to attention awaiting me. With another cracking salute, he recited the usual formula.

"*Bonjour, mon commandant! J'ai trouve du café. Voulez-vous du café?*"

That hot coffee laced with some of last night's fiery cognac put new life into me, and soon, with the neighbouring civilians wishing us god-speed, we were on the road again. Now we were launching out into the blue, resuming our true rôle of scouting ahead of the infantry to probe the enemy strength and defences. We wound along narrow country lanes, past farm after farm where the people came out to cheer and pass us peaches, pears and melons which made a very welcome breakfast. Up in the hills to the left of our road we knew that there were still German pockets with guns, but they did not take a crack at us.

Soon we were approaching the little town of La Garde, only seventeen kilometres from the heart of Toulon, and still no sign of the enemy. But

now we were running past deserted farmhouses and found the few remaining farm folk of the district trudging back to safer areas. The Boche was not far ahead now. It was our job to discover his strength and positions. And we did.

Within a mile of La Garde we skirted a thin cane brake, a scanty hedge of bamboo fringing a deep ditch. Just ahead was a bend in the road, round which lay the outlying houses of La Garde. The first recce car began to round the bend, and then things happened fast.

There was a crack and a flash, and the leading car was hit. It tried to haul back, but then burst into flames. My heart missed a beat. Behind that all too thin screen of bamboos we dismounted in the road beside the ditch. Langlois came hurrying up from his headquarters car, a covered waggon with wireless equipment, which was just astern of us. He started to talk to Tilly. "*Nous sommes allumés.*" And we were. At that moment there was a bright flash and a shattering crack as an eighty-eight shell cut the telephone wire just above my head, and it came jangling down round my feet.

Everyone dived into the ditch. Being new to land warfare, and encumbered by the telephone wire, I started last for that haven, but I think I was in the place money by the time we reached the bottom. It provided fine shelter, with steep banks about six feet high on either side, and a fringe of trees and bamboo towards the enemy.

The first thing to do was to get the cars back under a group of big trees just off the road. That was done, and the French officers settled down to sort out the situation. Obviously La Garde was held in some strength, and it was the job of this squadron to find out the precise position. Just then the enemy threw a few more eighty-eight bricks in our direction. Away to our left we heard a burst of machine-gun fire, and then another enemy machine-gun just the other side of the big field which lay beyond our ditch joined in.

Soon afterwards about ten Senegalese with a white officer came filing along our ditch to join us. An old Senegalese was grumbling away to himself. Their officer explained that he was in command of an advance patrol which had walked into trouble as they approached La Garde. He had lost a few men, and had to pull back.

The wireless operator in our headquarters car was busy passing back the information to base: "*Allo Leela* [it sounded like that]. *Allo Leela. Ici Langlois. Ici Langlois.*"

So there we were for the day, while the young officers and ratings of the squadron, in jeeps and recce cars, probed at La Garde from all sides. From time to time jeeps came racing back excitedly to report discoveries. Some did not return. Out to our left was one of our recce cars which had been knocked out by the enemy fire. It lay there derelict, its crew dead in the wreckage. The Germans lobbed an occasional shell around it, just to make sure. He also had the road under fire.

Every now and again the Germans would decide to take a crack at our cars which he knew were behind these trees. He never scored a direct hit, but he was close enough to send us diving into that ditch.

That was a delicate problem for me. As I was wearing the uniform of a lieutenant-commander in the British Navy, I could not make myself conspicuous in the dive for the ditch. I kept a close eye on my host, Commandant Langlois, and moved to cover a jump ahead of him. As he only moved when things got really hot, I did not spend as much time in that ditch as I would have liked.

During one burst of hate from the enemy, I lay in the ditch beside my friend, the little Chief Petty Officer. Being so ignorant of this land warfare, I did not realize how hot the enemy was getting until I saw some of these battle-hardened Fusiliers flinching a little at the sound of a close one, and crouching closer to the face of the ditch. But the C.P.O. did not turn a hair. He gave me a lesson in the symphony of war.

A whistle—a flash and a sharp crack.

Myself: "*Qu'est-que-c'est ça?*"

C.P.O.: "*Ah, quatre-vingt huit.*"

Myself: "Oh yes, I should know that by now. An eighty-eight."

Then came a whiffing sound and a plunk. No explosion.

Myself: "*Qu'est-que-c'est ça?*"

C.P.O.: "*Cela—c'est anti-char. Oui anti-char.*"

Of course that was a solid shot designed to pierce the armour of a tank.

So he identified for me the sounds of mortars, eighty-eights and anti-tank guns. This was sometimes varied by a burst of machine-gun fire, presumably aimed at one of our exploring cars or jeeps.

The Senegalese had mounted their Bren guns along the lip of the trench facing the enemy and screened by the grass and canes. I crawled up there to look at the landscape, and for a while took over one Bren gun from a black soldier. His white officer pointed out that they calculated there was a German machine-gun nest behind a farmhouse on the other side of the field, and I fixed my eyes in that direction.

At that moment everything looked beautifully peaceful in the noon-tide sun. Just a quiet sunbaked farming landscape. The trouble with spotting a German machine-gun post is that even when they open fire, you can see no flash, and their tracer bullets, unlike ours, do not light up red or green or white until they are half-way to the target. So you cannot get a precise line on the gun by observing the flight of the tracer. I thought that I saw some movement among leaves near the farmhouse, and let loose with a burst from the Bren. The officer of the Senegalese came along to see what had happened, and I explained. He thought I was a bit on the hopeful side, but did not mind my having a crack. It suddenly dawned on me that it was damned silly to stir up the Hun when he was being quite peaceful.

The hot hours dragged by. The Senegalese sentries lay up there in the cane brake keeping a close look-out in case the enemy decided to try chasing us out of our little copse. Away to our right French and German batteries duelled spasmodically along the main road to Toulon. On the coastal side we knew that we were at the tip of a tiny salient flanked by German guns in the hills.



Tilly told me that there was some question of us pulling back so that the French batteries could plaster the Germans in La Garde, but this was washed out. Naturally the French did not want to shell their own civilians unless it was vital.

From discussions overheard among the Fusiliers ratings, I discovered that the squadron was taking heavy casualties in probing the defences of La Garde. So that was why the young officer who had spoke English had not returned. He was a fine kid, and I felt a shock at realizing that he was lying out there—finished.

I talked about it with Langlois. He showed no emotion as he admitted to me that it was a black day for his squadron. He was a great officer, calm and quiet in the face of adversity. Tilly came up and joined us. It was then I was struck with the thought that they might regard me as a Jonah. In my best, halting French I explained what I felt.

"Perhaps your boys will begin to think I am bringing this black luck to the squadron," I suggested.

"No, no—nothing is further from our minds," smiled Langlois, and placed a friendly hand on my shoulder. Tilly joined in to reassure me.

"Yes, I know," I went on. "You two would not dream of such a thing, but some of your lads might be worrying. If you think it would be better, I'm quite willing to make my way back to Hyères."

They pooh-poohed the idea. It was ridiculous. I was a member of the squadron, and they would take me to Toulon.

The afternoon wore on slowly. Then a new word passed from mouth to mouth as we lay in the ditch sheltering from the latest blitz of eighty-eights.

"La Bim is coming. La BIM is coming."

To me it sounded like "*L'abime* is coming." *L'abime*—the abyss. I could not make sense out of that. I asked Tilly about it. He grinned broadly. No, it was not some new secret weapon called "the abyss". It was the B.I.M., the short name for a crack unit, the Bataillon d'Infanterie Marine du Pacifique. They were famous as tough assault troops and were husky men from the French Pacific colonies who had been among the first volunteers to flock to the standard of General de Gaulle. They had distinguished themselves as fighters on many a tough field of battle. Now they were to have a crack at taking La Garde by assault. The Fusiliers Marins had high admiration for these men of the Pacific, both for their bravery and their patriotism. Here were hundreds of young men, sons of French settlers, who had never seen the land for which they were now fighting, to whom Paris was but a name, but who treasured this unknown Motherland.

And as the sun dipped towards the west the men of the B.I.M. came filing along our ditch.

In the main they were tall, rangy men who reminded me strangely of my compatriots, the Australian fighting men. Perhaps this was the effect of their Pacific environment bringing out a particular type as it has done in Australia. With rifles, mortars and machine-guns they

passed us in single file a hundred or more strong. Most of them marched erect, their faces set and stern. They knew that they had a really hard nut to crack, and that quite a few of them were destined to die that evening. It was just that sort of operation—a frontal attack against strong enemy positions which had to be broken. I could almost see the seal of death upon some of those brave faces. Here and there in the line came a fellow who went jesting to meet his fate, flinging wisecracks at us as he passed. We exchanged greetings as they passed, and one big, bearded man got a particular laughing godspeed from the Fusiliers. Physically, I have never seen a finer body of men, and it made my heart ache to think of what they were marching to meet.

We had a pretty good idea of the German strength in and around La Garde, thanks to the probing of the young Fusiliers who had paid a heavy price for the information. But this intelligence had been completed by a young man in a blue shirt who had risked his life to crawl through the German lines and bring us precise details of the German dispositions. He was the photographer of the little town, and he had left his wife and child behind to do what he thought to be his duty to France. He was a brave youngster, and there were many like him in southern France. Not organized members of the Maquis, but just young men who did their best as soon as opportunity presented.

Not least among them do I count a mere schoolboy who had greeted us on our arrival in Hyères. I had almost forgotten about him.

He was in knickerbockers, and could not have been much more than twelve years old. As the Germans were falling back through Hyères he had managed to get hold of a rifle or tommy-gun from somewhere, and he had bagged two Germans. He danced with glee as he told me about it:

"*Ah, monsieur, ah, monsieur le commandant.* What joy. I have had the great honour of killing two Boches—two Boches, monsieur."

There had been plenty of others like him, although a bit older, and now the Photographer of La Garde. There did not seem to be much the matter with the youth of this part of France anyway.

The Photographer of La Garde had given us one particularly important piece of information. Not only had the Germans got eighty-eights, mortars, anti-tank guns, machine-gun nests, most of which he could pinpoint and all well protected, but they also had a Tiger tank roaming round in support.

That was a tough proposition for the B.I.M., but zero hour was fixed, and they would go over the top soon.

Half an hour before the assault was to start General de l'Orage burst upon us again. Driving his own jeep in typical style and a whirling cloud of dust he tore down the road without the enemy lobbing a single shell at him. With a screech of brakes, he skidded into our little encampment, almost side-swiping our sole remaining jeep. As before he fairly leaped from his jeep, seeming to be air-borne, and began screaming at the top of his voice in a way which entirely prevented me from catching the drift of his verbal assault.

Commandant Langlois answered him briefly as he paused for breath. Another burst of super-heated French, another brief reply from Langlois, and the General was whirling off again in the direction whence he had come. Langlois and Tilly grinned ruefully at each other.

"What now?" I asked. "What was my friend de l'Orage saying that time?"

Langlois explained: "He said that, if the B.I.M. got into any difficulties we were to go to their assistance."

"How?" I queried.

"That's just the point. I explained that I had only one recce car which could take the road, and one jeep, and that more than half my men had been knocked out."

"What did he say to that?"

"He just shouted, 'I don't give a damn if you have to mount the rest of your men on roller skates and send them in. If the B.I.M. get into difficulties you will go in and help.'"

Again Langlois and Tilly grinned at each other, and my heart skipped another beat. I just didn't fancy tearing round that corner and up the road to La Garde with my little single-shot musket. This was not my idea of a triumphal ride to Toulon. Something had gone wrong with the works. As I had watched the B.I.M. lads pass on the way to battle, I had fervently wished for their success. Now I had a long way more reason to wish it. One call from them and I would find myself mixed up in a nasty bit of battle.

Ten minutes later the B.I.M., about a hundred yards or so away to our left, and hidden from us by trees, opened up. Their mortars roared, machine-guns rattled and rifles cracked. The attack was starting. Now the German guns and mortars were roaring their reply. Dusk was closing in as this devils' chorus grew to a crescendo behind the trees over there.

From time to time I could hear the wireless operator in our headquarters car receiving and sending messages. I wandered over to talk to Langlois.

"How are the B.I.M. doing?"

"*Tout va bien.*"

Good old B.I.M. In the next half-hour I asked that question three or four times. And still the answer was the same. The B.I.M. were making good progress, and the sounds of battle were getting more distant. Down the road from Hyères came ambulances, and through the gloaming from the direction of La Garde came the stretcher-bearers carrying the wounded. Yes, the B.I.M. seemed to be paying a fairly heavy price.

At last the sounds of battle died down. An occasional rifle shot or short burst of machine-gun fire came from the direction of La Garde as the B.I.M. mopped up inside the little town. They had taken the German positions, and we had not had to go to their assistance.

Now I had time to look around me again at the larger scene. Away to the west, on the outskirts of Toulon, some buildings were blazing. The

bigger guns, French and German, were still duelling spasmodically away to our right. And all around us the hills were burning. It was an awe-inspiring sight. We seemed to be in the centre of a great bowl of fire. On all hands the pine forests which clad the hills around us were burning fiercely.

And there in the darkness half a dozen of us sat around the Photographer of La Garde asking him about the days of occupation. Soon he was anxious to get back to his wife and child in the town, so we loaded him with food for them, gave him some more cigarettes and watched him go trudging back along the road tired but happy after a good job done for his country.

Commandant Langlois came and sat beside me on the edge of the ditch.

"We are being withdrawn from the line in the morning," he said. "We are no longer an effective fighting unit."

"As bad as all that?" I asked.

"Yes," he sighed. "Today has been the blackest in the history of my squadron, and we have seen some pretty hard days. In fact it has been one of the blackest days in the history of the Fusiliers Marins."

He paused a while, and we both sat in silence for a few minutes. Then he went on:

"I have lost sixty per cent of my men, and we have only two scout cars left. Tilly's car in which you are is defective. It will have to be towed back. There's not much left of the whole squadron. We must go back and be reorganized—new men, new cars. Another squadron is coming up to relieve us. I'll transfer you to them if you like. They should reach Toulon tomorrow or the next day."

I thought a while. No—I had better get cracking back to Naples. My orders were to return after a week on the beach-head if all went well. Now it was more than a week since the landing, and Captain Dorling would probably be worrying about my fate. He treated me more as a son than as his Executive Officer. The last thing he had said before we sailed was:

"Now, Blore, please don't run yourself into danger. Don't do anything rash. I would never forgive myself if you got hurt, and I don't know what I would say to your wife. I feel responsible for you and all the others. After all, it is not worth having one of my officers even wounded for the sake of a headline."

By this time I felt that honour had been fully satisfied. I could withdraw from the line without shame, and, since the Toulon job had not gone according to my plan, it was getting late in the day to supply the correspondents with a naval story. So I told Langlois that I would stay with his squadron, and give Toulon a miss. He seemed to appreciate it, for he was beginning to regard me as a member of his squadron with whom I had won my spurs. One of the young officers who had been killed that day had given me a hand-painted Fighting French "flash"—the Cross of Lorraine—and I was truly proud to count myself an honorary member of the Fusiliers Marins.

That night, wrapped in a blanket and lying on the lip of the ditch, I watched the forest fires leaping on the surrounding hills and thought back over the experiences of the past few days. It had been an experience worth while, and filled me with admiration for the humble "pongoo".

The sheer discomfort of land warfare appalled me. For three days now I had not been able to get a proper wash. I had carefully preserved a bottle of mineral water from the fort for cleaning my teeth. A shave had been out of the question, and my face itched with a scrub of ginger beard. I had been bitten all over by these damned mosquitoes, clouds of them, which still buzzed around me as I lay here. I had lived on scraps of food eaten out of little tins and packets, and topped off with grapes and melons. Not a square meal in three days.

No, a soldier's life was something to be experienced to be believed. I thought of the lads of the Eighth Army who had battled their way across the desert and right up through Sicily and Italy, and mentally saluted the humblest private in that famous fighting force. I thought of the lads in the Burma jungle with a new and terrific admiration. At sea we had our home with us, like a snail carrying his house on his back. Even in a hot corner, as long as your ship stayed afloat, you had some comforts. You could at least get a good wash and clean your teeth at intervals. You could get something more than K rations to eat.

Yet as I lay there beneath the stars, I felt happy in my scruffiness.

Later, when I returned to Italy, I was to treat my newfound experience with suitable flippancy in an article for *The Union Jack* which began:

"Note to self: First Military lesson. Keep away from recce cars. Land war is far too dangerous. Stick to the sea.

"This little footnote to my hypothetical diary entry of Thursday, August 24, 1944, really has nothing to do with my story. It only means that, after my first (and last) experience of real land warfare, I say with Mr. Sam Goldwyn: 'Include me out'."

With such thoughts as these running around in my mind, I pulled the blanket over my head to shut out mosquitoes and drifted into sleep.

The next thing I knew, I was in the middle of that damned war again. I thought the B.I.M. had knocked out all the Huns in the vicinity, but that was my mistake. They had been given the job of capturing La Garde, and they had done it. But the enemy still had plenty of eighty-eights just beyond the little town, and now they were showing their spite by giving us a morning barrage. Shells were flashing and cracking all round our little encampment—a very nasty form of alarm-clock.

Quite by instinct I rolled over the lip of the ditch still wrapped in my blanket. When I unwound myself and stood up at the bottom, I was pleased to find that Commandant Langlois was already there. Apparently this dawn strafe was sufficiently thick to warrant taking cover. It was all over in five minutes. We climbed from the ditch again. By the faint dawn light we could see that luck was with us. Not a vehicle had been hit in that short burst of hate. We opened more tins and made

a bit of breakfast, and, as daylight came, we prepared to get under way.

The dawn barrage had reminded me that we were still well within range of the enemy. I thought of that stretch of road running back to Hyères. Yesterday the enemy had been ranging nicely on the first three hundred yards of it before it reached the shelter of some farmhouses. And soon we must be towed slowly along that road by another recce car—surely a pretty target for any German gunner. I only hoped that the anti-tank gun or guns were not still sighted on that road. Their solid shot would carve through the plating of a scout car like a knife through butter.

As we started off along that stretch, heading back for Hyères barracks, I felt quite an itchy feeling between my shoulder-blades until we were in the shelter of the farmhouses. Then, at last, I relaxed.

## CHAPTER XII

### OUT OF BATTLE

On the way back to Hyères we called at a fine mansion which lay just off our route to get cleaned up before we hit town. The headquarters of a French infantry battalion was just moving into the place, and the old housekeeper was running around like a flustered hen. The owner of the property, a white-haired dignified Frenchman, gave us a welcome, and his staff mustered to welcome our weary and battle-stained matelots.

The agricultural manager of the estate produced a large wicker demijohn full of good old brandy, and distributed glasses of it to us. He laughed as he showed us a label tied to the demijohn: "*Reservé pour les Allemands.*" Apparently we were considered entitled to this bottle in particular—we had "liberated" it. Great word "liberated". It was the catch phrase of those days. We "liberated" everything from a melon to a magnum of champagne.

As to *reservé pour les allemands*—the only thing reserved for them that morning, as I laughingly explained to my hosts in my best French, were the shells which we could hear whispering overhead towards the enemy lines on the outskirts of Toulon.

And after that reviving brandy came a wash and a shave. Never have I appreciated water, soap and a razor so much. We all stood around a pump, stripped, and wallowed in great buckets of ice-cold water.

After that we headed for Hyères. Now we managed to get our own scout car running, even though it clanked like a couple of skeletons dancing on a tin roof. Just short of Hyères it conked out again, and

while the driver fiddled with the innards, the Chief Petty Officer came to me once more with his cracking little salute, and reported:

"*Mon commandant*. We are going to that farm over there to make coffee. Would you like some coffee?"

I would.

We got a hearty welcome as we arrived at the farm, the smallholder, his wife and two small children bustling around to produce wine and fruit for us. Shyly they accepted our little gifts of tinned food and coffee, and tried to load us with the best of their own home-grown wine. They told me about life under the Boche regime, explaining that, as farming folk, they had not suffered nearly so badly as their neighbouring townsmen. When we returned to our car, the farmer and his two children came racing after us with two baskets of peaches he had hurriedly collected from his orchard, and waved to us as we clanked off along the road to Hyères once more.

Through the town we rattled and banged to the great military barracks which were the headquarters for the area.

A few hundred prisoners were squatting in the middle of the parade ground, and just as we pulled to a halt near a barracks block, a jeep came tearing through the gate with an ugly, sullen German senior officer to add to the bag. They were a strangely mixed crew, those German prisoners of the Riviera: second- and third-rate Germans, impressed Poles, Czechs, Hungarians and Russians, who had been kept fighting to the last by their German officers with pistols in their backs.

Just after we arrived there was a great stir of excitement. It transpired that one of the prisoners, an Armenian, of whom there were quite a few in the German ranks, had been identified by a local teen-age girl as the enemy soldier who had assaulted her before leaving Hyères. In a clear-cut case like this, the logical French did not waste time foolishly on a formal trial. The colonel in command of the barracks was satisfied by the girl's statement. He gave the order that the Armenian should be taken back to the house where he had committed the offence, stood against a wall and shot.

As our squadron of the Fusiliers Marins had been so badly cut about by the enemy, it should have the privilege of disposing of this criminal.

Once more my little friend, the Chief Petty Officer, came to me with his terrific salute, and said:

"*Mon commandant*, would you accept the honour of firing the first shot at this *salaud*?"

That was a poser. I had no fondness for the Germans or their dupes. I would have enjoyed putting a bullet through this nasty little specimen of an Armenian in the heat of fighting, but I just could not bring myself to shoot him in cold blood.

"Thank you, *mon vieux*," I explained to the C.P.O., "but in such an affair, which is an affair for the French Army, I can hardly accept such an honour."

"But now you are one of us," protested the C.P.O.

"Yes, and I'm proud of it," I went on. "But the trouble is that my

senior officers would be angry if they heard that I had interfered in this matter. Not that I do not appreciate the honour, but it would hardly be correct for a British officer to interfere."

"Well—come with us, and see justice done, *mon commandant*," invited the C.P.O.

I could hardly do less, and anyway I was interested to see how a man died in these circumstances.

They loaded the condemned man into a lorry, and a firing-party of the Fusiliers Marins jumped up with him. They did not brutalize him, but kept dragging him round to face them and telling him what sort of a rat he was. The Armenian was grey in the face, but he did not answer back and did not panic. He seemed resigned to his fate. As we drove through the streets of Hyères, word of the execution spread rapidly. People along the pavements shook their fists at the passing prisoner.

Soon we had reached the scene of the crime. Now the Armenian, silent, sullen and with the pallor of death already on his face, was hoisted down from the lorry to be stood against a wall. The Fusiliers Marins lined up with their tommy-guns. As they began to take aim, the Armenian's nerve broke at last. He began to run. There was a quick rattle of musketry, and the man in the field grey uniform fell in his tracks, writhed a little and lay still.

We climbed back in the lorry and returned to barracks.

But now it was time for me to leave my comrades of the Fusiliers Marins. I would have to hitch-hike back some thirty or forty miles to Ste. Maxime. I was reluctant to leave these landing-craft-on-wheels types, but I must get back to Italy before a flap started.

I shook hands all round. Langlois gave me a message to cable to his wife in Ismailia, Egypt, when I reached Naples. Tilly and the Chief Petty Officer wrote their home addresses in my notebook, and insisted over and over again that I must come and see them in France when the war was finished.

Then I was out on the road, and away. But first I would have a quick look at Hyères. In the heart of the town I was attracted to the one shop which was open, a provision merchant. Inside were three or four newly arrived American soldiers drinking wine, and the proprietor, Marcel Gouin, was glad of my arrival as an interpreter. He produced the best wines from his small remaining stock, and showed us in a catalogue that he was only charging us trade price for these bottles. My fee as an interpreter was a free bottle of excellent claret, and he also sold me a couple of bottles of excellent Burgundy for a few shillings.

I expressed my surprise at seeing his shelves so well filled. M. Gouin soon disillusioned me. He took me on a tour of his establishment, and from each shelf he took a packet, tore it open and spilled some of the contents into his hand. So-called egg powders, custard powders, soup powders and other dirty-looking mixtures he dismissed with an angry "*de la terre*" (made from dirt), and threw the stuff contemptuously on the floor. Other mixtures masquerading as teas or coffee he cast aside



as "*de l'arbre*" (mere ground leaves). At one counter he gestured expressively towards a mound of grey-looking powder which was supposed to be flour, expensive and in short supply. He also hammered to dust some hard-baked clay which was on sale under the name of soap. At last he dismissed his whole stock with a furious shrug, declaring that there was not an ounce of real nourishment on his well-filled shelves, and he gave thanks that he had no children to feed.

Finally he invited me into his adjoining residence for a glass of wine and a talk. There in the dining-room was laid out on the table the complete luncheon to which the chief purveyor of food in Hyères and his wife would soon sit down. Merely salad and a little dusky-coloured bread. If that were the best that M. Gouin could find for himself and his wife, I felt deeply sorry for the other citizens of Hyères. A couple of tins of rations which I had left brought profuse thanks and another bottle of wine.

That afternoon I rode towards Ste. Maxime in a variety of military vehicles, the last of which dropped me near the estate of my good friend Jean Marcel. By this time I felt as though I could lie down and go to sleep on the side of the road. After all I had had no real sleep for three nights, and the reaction from battle strain was just catching up on me.

Also I had promised M. Marcel some razor blades and other odds and ends, which I had carefully preserved in my kit-bag. So up the long drive to the house I dragged my tired legs.

Jean Marcel was taking his ease on the shady verandah.

"Good day, M. Marcel, I was just passing and I thought I'd bring you the razor blades and coffee I promised you," I said.

In a moment he was embracing me, and bidding me welcome to his home. He pulled up a comfortable chair for me, and hurried inside to summon his household, who came flocking to greet me.

M. Marcel came out again with a bottle of champagne in his hand.

"*Mon vieux*," he said. "But you look exhausted. You must rest a while, but first you must drink this. It will put new life in you. Where have you come from?"

It was with a little thrill of pride that I told him I had come straight from the line where I had been fighting with the Fusiliers Marins. The ladies clamoured to hear more, but Jean Marcel interrupted:

"Not now, not now. Later. Now you must drink this champagne, and then you will rest. You will stay the night—you must."

As the sun was nearly setting, and I could not hope to get to the air strip in time to fly to Naples that day, I did not demur. I would be happy to stay the night—and what a night.

M. Marcel shouted for his servants, and gave a flow of orders. The water supply of his home was cut off, and there was no electricity. But servants and friends set to work to boil large quantities of water on an open fire at the back of the mansion to make me a hot bath.

"And now," said my host, "you will sleep for an hour, and then

we will dine. What would you like for your dinner—goose, duck or chicken, or perhaps a pheasant? Just choose what you wish.”

I protested at such lavish offers. We had been warned that the people of the south of France were short of food. I had seen the sad plight of the citizens of Hyères. I could not accept such hospitality.

“No, no,” insisted M. Marcel. “Here it is different. In the countryside we are all right. Particularly here. You see the Germans encouraged me to produce my birds, but would not let me sell them to the towns. They took what they wanted for themselves. And my best wines I hid in the hills. So now we are well off. You and your comrades drove them out of this area so fast, they were not able to despoil me at the finish. So all this is rightly yours.

“Now please do not argue. What shall it be? Goose or duck or chicken?”

That sounded convincing—so I chose duck for dinner.

By that time the bath was ready, and when I had luxuriated in the hot water until it was tepid, my host conducted me to his best guest-room where the big, comfortable bed had been prepared with snow-white linen. This was a beautiful room, with lovely paintings adorning the walls and fine antique furniture. But right now I had eyes for only one thing—the big bed with the clean sheets. It was one of the most glorious sights I had seen for days.

The next thing I knew was a hand shaking my shoulder. I fairly leaped from that bed before I realized where I was. I had slept an hour and a half. Would I care to come down to dinner? Fine. I would be down soon.

I started to climb out of the silk pyjamas they had lent me, and looked around for my grubby shorts and shirt. They were nowhere to be found. All my clothes had disappeared, but over the back of a chair lay a silk dressing-gown and beside it were a pair of slippers. I poked my head out the door and called to my host.

“Just put on the dressing-gown,” he told me, “and come right down. Your clothes? Oh, my housekeeper is washing and mending those. Just come down in that dressing-gown and be comfortable.”

When I did get downstairs I found that the word had gone out to the neighbours to gather for a party.

A long table stood on the garden path in front of the verandah. It was loaded with bottles of champagne, vin rose and white wine, and around it sat some dozen people, who rose to greet me. I was seated at the head of the table with a glass of champagne, and the company began to fire questions at me.

“What was it like up there?” “Were we in Toulon yet?” “Had I had a hard time?”

As I told my story, trying not to make it sound boastful, the company kept making admiring remarks. They were treating me like a conquering hero, and this time I was thoroughly enjoying it. Back in Ste. Maxime I had felt a bit of a fool when old M. Mairin and his wife had acclaimed me as a liberating hero. Then I had had no real

experience of fighting. Now it was different. I felt that I could bask in the sunshine of admiration, and the past couple of days had been well worth it.

Wine flowed freely, and everyone was laughing and joking. But as darkness drew in the guests began leaving one by one. Some of the women came and kissed me and gave me their blessing as they departed—a not unenjoyable experience. And soon we were left with only those guests who had been invited to dinner. The table was cleared and relaid. We were to dine *al fresco* in the gloaming.

Food never tasted more luscious than that dinner. M. Marcel seemed to have killed about half a dozen ducks for the great occasion, and there were platters piled high with fried potatoes. With the duck was served some fine, heavy Burgundy. Frankly, I gorged myself. This certainly was a great little invasion. I felt as though I were walking on air when we rose to go inside the house. As I had brought some coffee and sugar with me, we were able to finish the dinner in style. The ladies kept exclaiming in gratitude over the coffee and sugar, luxuries for which they had been longing for years. And with the coffee came some very fine old brandy.

The wireless, run from a battery which had been carefully cherished, was turned on loudly. It was tuned to the B.B.C. French service, as my host proudly pointed out. Now they could have it on at good strength, but before we came they used to listen secretly to the B.B.C. each night, with the volume turned down to a whisper. What they heard was passed on by word of mouth to neighbours, and spread through the countryside.

Just then the B.B.C. interrupted the programme to make an urgent announcement:

“Marseilles is liberated! PARIS IS LIBERATED!”

The effect on our little company was explosive.

“Marseilles is liberated! PARIS IS LIBERATED!” they shouted at each other. They cheered, they embraced each other. Everyone embraced me. The women kissed me to my greater enjoyment. Somebody started to sing the “Marseillaise”, and now we all stood at attention and sang the French National Anthem at the top of our voices. Tears of joy were streaming down the faces of men and women alike. Somebody started to sing “God Save the King”. They did not know the words, but they sang the tune right lustily, and I provided the words.

M. Marcel went out of the room with one of his friends, and they returned laden with bottles of champagne. That was a party! I am a bit hazy about the latter part of it, though I do remember M. Marcel producing a gramophone record from a drawer and proudly showing it to me. They turned off the wireless, and in my honour they played that record over several times. On one side of it was “Tipperary”, which to the people of the Continent is Britain’s second national anthem, and on the other side was “There’s a Long, Long Trail a-Winding”.

I sang the words of both, and the others joined in. They had listened

to that record, and got some idea of the words, even though they did not understand them and got some strange results.

At last my host and one of his guests escorted me upstairs to the door of my bedroom, and, after kissing me on both cheeks, bade me a happy good night.

My head had hardly touched the pillow when I fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

When I awoke the sun was streaming in the window. My clothes, laundered and mended, were on a chair by the bed, and a few minutes later my host himself walked in, bringing me a breakfast tray which included two new-laid eggs.

After I had shaved and was just finished dressing my host returned to see that I had everything I wished. He expressed an earnest wish that I would stay for a few days, and I was sorely tempted. But it would not do. I guessed that, by this time, Captain Dorling was getting anxious, and I had also given my officers orders to rendezvous with me in Naples on D plus 7. Here it was D plus 10, and I was still in France.

Reluctantly I explained to M. Marcel. He was disappointed, but understanding. As we talked, he picked up the fag-end of my shaving stick which was standing on the dressing-table. He sniffed at it and stroked it with his fingers. I suddenly realized that, for all the luxury of his home, this little piece of soap represented true luxury to him right now. For years he had seen nothing so attractive. When he saw that I had noticed his action, he quickly laid the soap down, and was a little embarrassed when I offered it to him. He thought that I might have considered he was hinting.

When I pressed the bit of shaving stick upon him, to go with the razor blades I had previously given him, you would have thought that I had presented him with a diamond. He carried that measly piece of shaving stick around the house, displaying it proudly to the other male guests. My only regret was that I had not brought a half dozen shaving sticks with me.

Before I left M. Marcel showed me over his estate, his great wire poultry runs filled with hens and rare game birds. Ducks, geese and turkeys roamed around. One cage held a wild boar piglet, which M. Marcel released. It was a little clown that wild boar, and it raced round the garden trying to persuade us to chase it. M. Marcel had brought it up from a few days old.

"The hills behind here are just full of wild boar now," he told me. "You should come back here when the war is over for some shooting. For the past few years there has been no shooting, no cartridges. So the wild boar have multiplied as never before."

After stowing a couple of bottles of his best vin rose in my German knapsack, M. Marcel escorted me down to the road, and stood talking until an American lorry came along and gave me a lift to Ste. Maxime.

I found the Press villa empty. In my absence the war correspondents had gone in pursuit of the fast advancing war, and were now fifty miles inland. No matter. My job was over, so I made my way to R.A.F.

Press Relations party the other side of St. Tropez, and thence to the aerodrome by now established on what had once been a vineyard running down to the sea.

That is the advantage of being well forward. You do not need travel orders in duplicate and other documents. You go to the nearest aerodrome and "thumb" a ride to wherever you want to go.

On this small improvised aerodrome were big hospital planes leaving for Rome, some fighters and a couple of Mitchell medium bombers. The traffic controller suggested that I speak to the captain of one of the Mitchells which was to leave soon for Naples. Just my cup of tea. And soon I had booked myself a ride back.

While we waited I saw a naval type in a strange kind of uniform. He was wearing the pale blue shirt and rough trousers which were the normal peasant rig in these parts. But on the shoulders of his shirt he wore straps identifying him as a lieutenant of the Fleet Air Arm. I asked him how he had invented this new rig of the day.

"Forced down behind the German lines, old boy," he told me.

He had been flying a fighter from one of the British escort carriers lying off the coast on D-day.

"Made a forced landing," he explained. "The French people were wonderful. They fixed me up with this rig, and found me a bicycle. I kept my shoulder straps, but ditched the rest of my uniform.

"Cycled right through the German lines, and they didn't take any notice of me. They were too busy pulling out."

I would have liked to hear more of his story, but my Mitchell was about to take off, and I had to get back.

An hour or so later we were flying high over Rome, and heading southwards. Then Vesuvius lay ahead, and Naples again.

As I had guessed, there had been a minor flap about myself. I was three or four days overdue.

I was genuinely touched by the welcome back I received from my Italian staff. Miss Elizabeth Durst, the tall, cultured, kindly, governess-like woman who was working as my secretary at Navy House, had tears in her eyes as she greeted me.

"Ah, Commander Blore, it is so good to see you. We were worrying so much," she told me. "Do you know that Conchita and Anna [the two stewardesses at the Mess] were going to the church twice a day to pray for your safety?"

"That was kind of them," I said.

"Conchita was crying yesterday when she told me, 'But the Signor Commandante will be all right. God would not let him die. He is so good to me and my children. He must be all right.'"

Yes, I was lucky in my personal staff in Naples. Perhaps my strictures on the southern Italian were a bit too tough. At least there were some mighty good ones.

Now I was promising myself an early return to England. That spot of bother around Toulon would be the only time I would shove my chin out this side of the Far East.

But soon I was disillusioned. There was one more job to do. The liberation of Greece. Of course this was not to be a regular fighting job. With the Russians cracking down across the Carpathians, and the Germans being shoved back towards their own frontier in the West, the enemy should soon be starting to pull out of the Ægean Peninsula. We did not have enough troops to drive him out. We would wait until he got out, and then move in in his wake, with supplies for the starving Greeks.

This operation would be carried out from two directions: the main body coming from Alexandria, and including many landing craft. More landing craft and cruisers and destroyers from Italy.

Planning this job for the Press was a good excuse to go to Rome again and make joint arrangements with the Army Press Relations staff now established in the Italian capital. Anyway, I felt entitled to a spot of leave in Rome after the south of France party.

That visit to Rome was lucky in more ways than one. I am quite convinced that it played a large part in saving me from a sticky end.

For as soon as I returned to Naples I was hailed by the S.O.(I), Staff Officer, Intelligence, at Navy House.

"Just the man we've been hunting for. Captain Boulby wants to drop you into Hungary by parachute."

My heart turned a somersault. It was an idea which just did not appeal to me after I had decided that I was not looking for any more trouble this side of the Far East. Anyway, I had better go and see this Captain Boulby, who, I learned, was the naval representative on an Anglo-American board of the three services which operated agents in enemy territory.

"Where do I find this Captain Boulby?" I asked.

S.O.I. telephoned him. Yes, I was expected. The address was Via Mantoni—a big white block of flats beyond the Orange Grove—top floor. Would I go right up.

This was becoming awfully Baroness Orczy or John Buchan. P.J. drove me up the hill in a jeep. There was the big block of flats. I climbed to the top. Didn't seem to be any offices here. An open door led straight into an Italian kitchen where a woman was cooking a meal.

"Captain Boulby?" I asked. She nodded towards another door. I stepped through and found myself in a comfortable office with a magnificent view over the Bay of Naples. There were three girls, stenographers, in the room, three of the prettiest English girls I have ever met.

"Hm—these espionage blokes know how to choose the immediate scenery."

Yes, Captain Boulby was expecting me. Would I take a seat, and he would be here in a minute. I sat and admired the "scenery", smoking nervously the while. Was it imagination, or did these girls look back at

me as though I were already a burnt offering. An American Army officer came in and greeted me cheerfully—followed by a British officer. And, at last, Captain Boulby.

"Come into my office, Blore. . . . Now you know why I have sent for you, don't you."

"Yes, sir."

"You speak Hungarian, don't you."

"A bit, sir, and that rather rusty."

"Hm. But you have relatives and well-placed friends in Hungary, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir. I suppose you got this information from my old friend, Major Dick Lewis, in Cairo."

He ignored this quiz.

"Well, Blore. We want to drop you into Hungary by parachute to do a certain job of work. Will you do it?"

"No thank you, sir."

"Why not?"

"Being forty years old and happily married, I hardly think this is my mark, sir."

"Hm. I'm afraid that doesn't count in this kind of job."

"Well, sir, to be perfectly frank with you, I'm afraid of the job."

"You'd be a damned fool if you weren't. But will you do it?"

"I suppose you will go on asking that question until I say 'yes'. All right, sir, I'll say yes now."

I felt that it was a bit cold-blooded to tell me that they were gambling on me; that a number of agents had been smuggled over the frontier of Yugoslavia into Hungary, and no more had been heard from them. It was all so cold-blooded. There was no organized resistance in Hungary, so I would have to lone wolf it.

"Know Morse, Blore?"

"Yes, sir."

"Could you work a wireless set?"

"Afraid not, sir. Never been much good at that sort of thing."

"Oh well, we'll send a wireless operator and set in with you. We'll also drop you in some sort of uniform. If you're picked up after the drop and they don't find the wireless set, you'll have a chance. We don't want to have you scraping a wall with your shoulder-blades if we can help it."

We settled down to discuss details. I should be dropped near my mother-in-law's home just outside Budapest. I drew small maps of the district and explained the lay-out. Don't drop me to the right of this main road to Szekesfehervar. There was a lake there, thick with reeds and weeds. That was interesting. Might provide cover if things got hot.

"Could we put you in by Lysander without being spotted, Blore?"

"Afraid not, sir. There's the village of Agard here, and plenty of farms around."

"All right—it'll have to be a parachute."

As far as I could make out, I was supposed to stay in Hungary until the Russians came through, but I would get my full instructions at Bari. Yes, I had better stand by to hand over my duties to my First Lieutenant. Boulby would get in touch with Captain Dorling and arrange things. He telephoned to Bari and discussed me with somebody there.

"Yes—doesn't speak Hungarian as fluently as we had hoped. . . . Oh yes, he knows some well-placed people there. . . . Looks fit enough. . . . What, by Sunday. . . . I'll try to get it fixed."

I was feeling more like a burnt offering every minute. A final explanation. Pack a bag and stand by to go to Bari. I would have a short parachute course there, about three days and in on the fourth night. I would be hearing from Captain Boulby as soon as he had fixed things with Captain Dorling.

And that is where I was lucky again. First I had been in Rome when they wanted me, and now Captain Dorling and the Commander-in-Chief were visiting Toulon and Marseilles. The essence of the contract, owing to weather conditions, state of the moon and other considerations, was speed. I should be trained and dropped into Hungary within a week.

I walked out of that building in a daze. P.J. was waiting in a jeep.

"Johnno, I need a drink—and then I'll tell you all about it. There's the Orange Grove. Let's go."

Over several gins I told P.J. the position.

"So there you are, my son. You'll have to take over the works here."

P.J. grinned.

"Rather you than me, chum," he remarked. "So nice to have known you."

That evening I went on a party to steady my nerves and stop myself thinking. Next morning I got a letter from home. My wife had had a severe nervous breakdown from the strain of working under the menace of the flying bombs and at the same time looking after our little daughter.

Whew! Here was a nice kettle of fish. I could hardly go back to Boulby with this letter, and explain that I did not feel that I could go on with the job. I could not write and tell my wife anything: only leave another of those "in case" letters. I was plenty worried. I reassured myself by thinking that by going into Hungary I could at least look after my wife's family when the Russians came through as conquerors—if I were still in one piece by then.

For the next few days, waiting for the C.-in-C. and Dorling to return, I felt as though I were sitting on a razor blade. A judicious use of alcohol kept my nerves from jitterbugging.

Dorling and the C.-in-C. returned to Naples. Ah. Now it would not be long. Dorling was appalled at the news.

"Good heavens, Blore!" was his remark. "I could never take the responsibility of releasing you to such a job. What on earth could I tell your wife if anything went wrong? Not that I want to stand between you and a D.S.O."



"I wish you would, sir."

"Why on earth did you say yes to this proposition, Blore?"

"Well, sir. If you were informed that you were the only man immediately available for an essential but sticky job, and asked whether you would volunteer, what could you say?"

"Mm. Yes. I suppose so, Blore. I suppose so. But I will not take the responsibility of deciding. I will leave it to the C.-in-C."

That was Saturday. The following evening I was in the Mess writing a letter, and thinking that I was in a mess in more senses than one. Enter P.J., post-haste from Navy House.

"Hey, Digger," he shouted as he came through the door, "Captain Boulby and some Army wallah with red tabs have just been at Navy House looking for you. Will you ring them up?"

We had no telephone in the Mess, so I had to go to the Hotel Metropole a hundred yards along the front.

"This is it, Johnno," I remarked as calmly as I could, though I felt as nervous as blazes.

"So nice to have known you, old son," he grinned back. He was getting a bit on my nerves with that remark, but probably it was the best line he could take in the circumstances.

At the Hotel Metropole I got through to Captain Boulby at his office up the hill.

"Oh, hullo, Blore. I've just been talking to the people in Bari."

"Yes, sir, I'm all ready." I swallowed hard.

"Well, it's like this, Blore. There has been so much delay—and owing to the weather and this and that, the time has gone past."

"Yes, sir." I did not dare to believe what I now suspected.

"I'm afraid we'll have to wash out that job—at least for the present. We may have something else for you later. I'm very sorry, Blore."

"I'm bloody glad, sir. Good-bye," was all I could stutter. I replaced the telephone receiver, and then I laughed like a madman. I was trembling all over, and felt as though a clockwork spring had gone whir inside me.

"What's the answer, Digger?" asked P.J., who was standing behind me.

"It's washed out—at least for the present," I said, and laughed again. Now I was trembling all over from reaction. It took quite a few niggers that evening to steady me down.

And that is how I nearly became a hero—or a corpse. The strange sequel to the whole thing was that a fortnight later I followed the example of my wife and had the most crashing nervous breakdown.

But before the crash came, I went in search of more stories about the landing-craft boys.

"Tackline" came breezing back into Naples, and I tried for a while to pin him down for the wealth of material he had promised to provide for this book. But he was in one mad rush at the time, winding up his flotilla's part in the France invasion, and getting ready for the Greek job which might happen any day, or be, as it happened, weeks ahead.

"Pat", on the other hand, was out of action. At the L.C.T. base they told me that he had caught a packet of shrapnel in his knee during the assault on the Riviera, and was in hospital. They expected him to be brought back to a hospital in Naples, but for the time being I could not track him. From what "Tackline" told me, the British landing craft on the right wing of the Riviera invasion had had the roughest spin, as I had guessed when I saw the intensity of bombardment and bombing in that direction.

Even then, said "Tackline", it had been a picnic compared with Elba or Salerno, and "Pat" had been one of the few casualties.

As "Tackline" went whizzing off to the Adriatic, I decided that I would have to gather some landing-craft material for myself. My first discovery was that, in all the armada for the Riviera, there had been just three British Landing Ships—Tanks, my old friends the *Bruiser* and the *Thruster*, and L.S.T.12.

Building L.S.T.s and L.C.I.s is the monopoly of the American shipyards, and *Bruiser* and *Thruster* were two of the only three L.S.T.s to be built in British shipyards. They looked much more like regular ships than the American L.S.T., and Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, who has a gift for a good phrase, once called them the Rolls-Royces of landing ships. But on the strength of their names and records, they were known in the Mediterranean as "The Killers". For *Bruiser* and *Thruster* had been up with the leaders in nearly every operation there between Sicily and the Riviera. Salerno and Anzio were among their battle honours, and by the time they reached southern France they had covered 50,000 miles.

They had carried British, French, Canadian and American troops—and Goums complete with mules. Their cargoes had included tanks, trucks, self-propelled guns, anti-aircraft batteries and loads of cement. On the Riviera they had landed the French armour which was the first heavy fighting material to go ashore.

The *Bruiser* had one private operation to her credit. This was when she inadvertently blocked the Suez Canal for a while. She had been caught by a sudden thick sandstorm, and had to heave to in the canal. Her awkward bulk began to swing broadside across the narrow waterway.

Then the order was given to let go her stern anchors to check the ship. But it was too late. To the astonishment and alarm of an Army officer standing on the bank of the canal, two great anchors crashed into the sand at his feet.

Another "case history" is that of L.S.T.319. Between December 15, 1942, when she was first commissioned by a British crew at the Navy Yard in Philadelphia, and April 1, 1944, she had steamed 25,600 miles, and in the Mediterranean had carried 8,370 troops, 82 tanks and 2,022 mechanical vehicles. After the Salerno landing she acted as hospital ferry.

But coming to the real landing craft, there was one L.C.I. whose Commanding Officer, Lieutenant A. J. Cramp, R.N.V.R., had kept an interesting diary of an invasion. This was a concise account of the tough Salerno job. It is graphic in its baldness:

- September 9 (1943): Mortar fire, shells near.
- „ 10: Raids all day, shelling.
  - „ 11: More raids, more shelling, just missed.
  - „ 12: Quieter. Took wounded to hospital ship. Near miss by bomb.
  - „ 13: Cruisers bombarded all day. More air raids.
  - „ 14: Shelled all day.
  - „ 15: Air raids, more shelling. PAINTED SHIP UNDER FIRE  
[The capitals are mine].
  - „ 16: Monotonous shelling and air raids.
  - „ 17: Raids all night, shelling all morning.
  - „ 18: Breakfast cold from shelling; bomb thirty yards away.
  - „ 19: Quieter, but shells a few yards away.
  - „ 20: Another near miss. First Lieutenant hit by shrapnel, not serious.
  - „ 21: Still shelling us.
  - „ 22: Air raids and shells.
  - „ 23: Painted ship under fire.
  - „ 24: Quieter. Took off casualties.
  - „ 25: All quiet. Went to Capri and dined at Ciano's villa.

The typically laconic note in this log, and particularly the references to painting ship under fire and breakfast getting cold struck me as true landing-craft style.

"We used to go in twelve times a day to beach at Salerno," Lieutenant Cramp told one of my officers. "We suffered many air attacks and escaped with some near misses. We took in troops, supplies and stores, carried off wounded and became a sort of maid of all work." At Salerno Lieutenant Cramp also rescued another L.C.I. with which he had originally crossed the Atlantic from America, when the other craft ran aground. Under heavy shellfire, which deluged his little ship from near misses, Lieutenant Cramp ran in, passed a line to his "chummy ship", and towed her to safety.

Another L.C.I. with a typically fine record was commanded by a Dutch naval officer, with an Australian sub-lieutenant as his "Number One". This craft, after sailing across the Atlantic, manned for the most part by nineteen-year-old ratings straight from the call-up, had packed a lot of adventure into six months, and her young ship's company were now veterans of half a dozen actions, which was more than many bigger ships which had spent twice as long in the Mediterranean.

In the Sicilian invasion this craft helped to land American troops at Gela, and then supported them by engaging German Tiger tanks which broke through to the beaches. Although more vulnerable than the Tigers, she gave battle with her Oerlikons until the Americans could deal with the menace.

The closest call experienced by this L.C.I. was in landing troops behind the enemy lines during the invasion of Italy.

For a landing-craft type that was all in the day's work. The trouble was that the job took a bit longer than anticipated, and when daylight came they were still off the beach. They made a run for it, but not before five six-inch coastal guns had got their range. Shell after shell straddled them, and the comment of Sub-Lieutenant Murrell, the Australian First Lieutenant, tells a lot in a little:

"It wasn't too pleasant, especially as they hit us. Luckily it didn't stop us, and nobody was hurt. We managed to dodge the bricks after that."

To be hit by a six-inch brick and then describe it as "not too pleasant" is a masterpiece of understatement.

More in the humorous vein was the story of one landing craft which took part in the operations in Sicily, at Reggio, Salerno and Anzio. Throughout these jobs the landing craft ran its own floating farmyard. It had ducks, geese, chickens, rabbits—and even pigs on board.

"We reckoned that the food situation might become acute," explained the Coxswain, Chief Petty Officer J. G. Lockyer. "Every time we went ashore we bought poultry and livestock. At one time we had four pigs, a dozen ducks, about sixty chickens and a few rabbits and geese.

"Petty Officer Alford and Able-Seaman Martin ran our farmyard, but most of the others joined in to give a helping hand. Those birds and animals had their muster every day, just to make sure that none had broken out of the ship or taken leave. The stock had the free run of the ship, and whenever things got hot they did not seem a bit upset by shelling or bombing.

"We used to fatten them up, and Able-Seaman Littlewood, who was a pork butcher at High Wycombe in peacetime, used to do the killing for us. While other ships were having cold spam for Christmas dinner, we were eating fresh roast pork, goose and duck.

"But those confounded hens let us down badly. All the time we kept them in comfort they laid only one egg. That was produced on the day we went to Anzio, and was a great occasion. There was much discussion about who should have it, but eventually we gave it to the First Lieutenant."

When that craft returned to Britain in the first half of 1944, after steaming more than 28,000 miles in just over twelve months, only two rabbits remained on board. The rest of the livestock had died a noble death in a good cause.

Another good case history is the personal one of Lieutenant Richard Dormer, D.S.C., R.N.V.R.

Like "Tackline", he was a veteran of Combined Ops. The big Dieppe raid, North Africa, Sicily and Salerno were among his personal battle honours.

"I received a vigorous baptism in the Navy technique of combined operations at Dieppe," said Lieutenant Dormer.

His next big job was in the North African landings, where he was serving in a British landing-craft flotilla which landed guns, jeeps and other mechanized equipment for the Americans near Oran. His account of that job showed the ingenuity shown by the landing-craft boys when faced with a new situation.

"Everything went well until something we had not bargained for came into the picture," he explained. "We found that the approaches to the shore were lined with parallel ridges of sandbank. Our craft were heavily laden, and we struck the top of one of these sand ridges. That made us think a bit, but we solved the problem all right.

"First of all we packed most of our weight, as far aft as possible. Then we waited for a good following wave, went full speed ahead and charged the sand ridge. In this way we got three-quarters of the way across. So next we shifted all the weight forward and waited for another good wave to carry us over.

"Of course it was a bit laborious at first, but in no time we had become expert sea hurdlers, and we kept this up for forty-eight hours in ferrying material from the parent ship."

At Sicily Lieutenant Dormer had command of his own flotilla of landing craft which took in Canadian assault troops, which reminded him of Dieppe.

"Dieppe was a hot spot, but Salerno—that was tougher still," he said.

"Things were entirely different at Salerno. We went in behind a sloop, and then things began to get difficult. My flotilla got separated from the others, and there was a lot of fire ashore.

"As we approached the beach, the sun was just coming up and I could see what was happening. So could the enemy. They had brought their tanks down to the beach and were directing a nice cross-fire at the landing craft. Every craft approaching the beach had to run the gauntlet of a hail of fire.

"Then I saw two landing craft racing up and down in front of us, putting up a smokescreen. They were doing a wonderful job. One was hit and stopped, but the other carried on. We all made as much smoke as possible, and only two of my original flotilla failed to touch down.

"When we returned to the parent ship, we were directed to make landings at another part of the coast which was quieter. But the German guns found us and started an intense shelling of the beach. Salvoes from our own ships started screeching over our heads. We kept on with the job, landed our men and materials and returned to the parent ship."

One of the real hard-luck stories of landing craft in the Mediterranean was told me by an old friend whom I was delighted to discover still in that Sea when I returned for the second time.

I met him not long after I reached Naples in March, 1944.

"Still here," I greeted him. He looked a bit sour at that one.

"Only just," he replied. "My boys haven't got over it yet."

"Well, come on, old son, don't talk in cryptograms. What's the matter this time."

"Are my boys chokker?" he began. "Last November we got the buzz that we were going home. After all, we'd done North Africa, Sicily and Italy—so we felt we had earned it.

"First of all they sent us to Gib as the first stage of the voyage home. They kept us there for a while, but the word was definitely given that we would sail for the United Kingdom on a certain date. We worked it out that we would get home just in time for Christmas.

"My boys were right on top of the world. They fairly sang as they painted ship. They were going to make the ship look like a new pin for homecoming. And the souvenirs and eats they bought at Gib to take home could be just about measured in tons.

"The ship was festooned with bananas. Rabbits [the naval slang for presents] were stowed everywhere—stockings, perfume, wine, lemons, nuts. Those lads were certainly going to have a terrific Christmas at home.

"The great day drew near, and we were waiting for our sailing orders.

"They came all right. At first I could hardly believe them. We were to turn about and return to Italy.

"That was a very gloomy Christmas for all hands. And if you'd like a nice lynching, just mention the word bananas to any of my lads."

I drank with him in silent sympathy.

. . . . .

It was at Naples too that I heard for the first time what was to me a new song of the L.C.T.s. It was at a bright little party in one craft, and by the time the lads got round to it I was not thinking of taking a short-hand note. All I can remember of it is the opening couplet. I have tried since to find a landing-craft type who knows it, but it seems to have been of Neapolitan origin. If any landing craftsman who knows it all should read this book, I would be very glad if he would give me the full lyric.

This song, sung in the famous bored, mock-public-school style of the Western Brothers, begins drawlingly:

The bow doors are open and the ramp is on the beach.  
There's nothing to worry about now. . . .

## CHAPTER XIII

## ADRIATIC ADVENTURES

I CAN hardly leave the Mediterranean without some account of the great work of the landing-craft lads in supplying, sustaining and supporting Marshal Tito's Partisan army. I will long regret that I never had the chance to go to Yugoslavia with "Tackline", so I have had to rely on talks I had with brother officers who worked in landing craft between Italy and Yugoslavia, others who actually worked inside Yugoslavia, and an amusing report which was supplied to me by Lieutenant Harold Laycock, the member of my own little party who, as I describe later, got side-swiped into "the drink" by a Yugoslav Amazon to whom he tried to play Sir Walter Raleigh.

I know this is going to provoke a storm of protest, even from some of the lads who went to Yugoslavia, but I did find that a considerable proportion of these officers took a rather dim view of the Yugoslav Partisans. I would say this to the Yugoslavs before they start howling for my scalp. If they cannot accept honest criticism from officers who made considerable sacrifices to help them liberate their country from the German yoke, they are not yet sufficiently advanced for democracy as we know it in the West. Of course they may subscribe to the belief expressed by a Russian colonel to an American war correspondent I knew in Sofia: "How can you have democracy with more than one political party!"

My first impression of Tito's Yugoslavia was gleaned from an officer I met in passing through Algiers. This young lieutenant had just come out of Yugoslavia, where he had been performing special secret duties, and was on his way home to England to make a report. He left me in no doubt that the partisan view of democracy was distinctly one-sided, and that atrocities were not entirely confined to the Germans. At the time I thought that such conditions were hardly surprising in view of the terrible time that Yugoslavia and the Partisans in particular had experienced since the German invasion, and, after all, the Yugoslav outlook on life is very different from our own, which is bred of a comparatively comfortable life and absence of invasion throughout our modern history.

That might have been an isolated view, but it was confirmed in my mind by another R.N.V.R. officer who was sent to Yugoslavia on the strength of his wide knowledge of Russian and other Slav languages. This officer, who was very well acquainted with Russia and widely travelled in Europe, gave me a closer angle on the same subject.

"The young Tito officers are pretty good chaps," he told me. "But this damned commissar system is the limit. It's like the Russian system in the old style."

"How do you mean?"

"I found the Partisan officers were good mixers when on their own. I'd be talking away pretty freely with these chaps, and then somebody else would enter the room. They would all close up like oysters. A sort of gloom descended upon the party."

"Why? Who was the newcomer?"

"Oh, just the old-fashioned commissar. The type they needed in Russia in the early days of the revolution. They seemed to have unloaded their discards on Yugoslavia. As far as I could discover, these Partisan commissars were the real old-fashioned Moscow-trained type. The Partisans, who would otherwise have been quite friendly and human, closed up in a fright when one of these commissar lads was around."

"What about Tito himself?"

My informant had a high opinion of the Marshal as a leader for the type of fighting going on in this part of the world.

"There's no doubt that Tito is a brilliant guerilla general, but he's also the super-commissar. After all, he's probably spent more of his life under training in Russia than in his native land."

So it is not surprising that I began to form the opinion that Yugoslavia was a branch office of Moscow. There was also the spot of bother at the Yugoslav base in Italy. Allied leaders became definitely worried about the system prevailing in this bit of Yugoslavia on the wrong side of the Adriatic. Perhaps the Yugoslavs were wise in the existing state of affairs to follow the example of the Soviet Political Police in "liquidating" any possible or potential enemy in time of war. But Allied leaders were definitely worried by reports of executions at this base in Italy.

I learned that official representations were made to these Yugoslavs, appealing to them to take back to their own country to execute rough justice anybody whom they suspected.

So now I await the storm which should break over my head, only reminding critics that these statements are drawn from dispassionate naval officers who were predisposed to comradeship with Tito's followers. Only a few days ago I met a couple of old shipmates who had been right inside Yugoslavia for much of the period of fighting. Their conversation just clinched my opinion about the Russian influence in that unhappy country.

As to the landing-craft lads, who had most to do with the Partisans, they had their fraternization problem long before the B.L.A. crossed the Rhine. They went to Yugoslavia with all the goodwill in the world, only to be rebuffed and left perplexed. Plenty of them told me so.

Yet nobody can say that the British Navy let Tito down. By the spring of 1944 Marshal Tito had got himself a navy. It consisted of four British destroyers, a swarm of His Majesty's motor torpedo-boats and gunboats, a couple of supply-transport, a fleet of fishing caiques and, above all, the landing craft of the Royal Navy.

The destroyers, remaining at aloof bombardment range of the Yugoslav coast and operating from Italian bases, seldom saw a Partisan. The boys of the Light Coastal Forces, with their M.T.B.s and M.G.B.s, got



closer. At their island base in the cove of Komiza, at Vis, their boats mingled briefly with the Dalmatian guerillas. For the most part these sea-wasps maintained constant patrols, giving the enemy coastwise shipping sheer hell in many a swift night action.

The transports mostly ferried Yugoslav wounded, enemy prisoners and some refugees to destinations in Italy.

And the caiques were Tito's private concern, his own little Navy, a weird one. They were manned by piratical-looking Yugoslavs with itchy trigger fingers, who did not know much about modern naval warfare, but would fight at the drop of the handkerchief and take on any odds in their own manner of sea-borne guerilla warfare.

So it was left almost exclusively to our landing-craft personnel to work in close conjunction with the Partisans on exploits among the enemy garrisons which studded the maze of islands which form a break-water and first line of defence for the Yugoslav coast—all very beautiful for peacetime cruises along the Dalmatian coast, but a very pretty brand of death-trap and an excellent field for guerilla warfare in times of conflict.

And in those operations Marshal Tito said "No fratting!"—or Serbo-Croat words to that effect.

That was why I was very interested to hear Harold Laycock's opinion when he returned from the Adriatic. After all, he was a widely travelled and broad-minded young man, who had spent much of the few years before the war roaming the Balkans as journalist, and as almost at much at home in Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia as he was in London or his native Yorkshire. From such an experienced observer, with no bias against the local people—rather an admiration—I should get a really dispassionate account.

First of all I asked him about this "fratting" problem of which I had heard with some sour comments from landing-craft types.

"Oh, Tito hasn't discriminated against the British in this matter," said Laycock. "After all he did decree that even Partisan and Partisanette should pass each other by on the other side."

Apparently sex should not rear its ugly head in this war.

That might be very wise. Fighting was the primary job right now.

Then Harold Laycock told me of a story which I believe to be perfectly true. It has happened in different circumstances in North Russia to my own knowledge.

"The British authorities were naturally less severe on this matter," said Laycock. "I heard one terrific story in Vis, and the lads swore it was true.

"A dance was organized there one night. Coastal Forces and landing-craft boys turned up in eager numbers. Their first problem was where to park their caps and coats. They just couldn't distinguish the gentlemen's and ladies' cloakrooms from each other, because both were stacked with carbines and cartridge belts."

Allee samee Russia, I thought. The Russians just could not believe

that British naval officers came ashore unarmed. They are quite convinced that we have small revolvers strapped under our armpits.

The Slavs seem to have an obsession with lethal ironmongery. Nobody who is not festooned with firearms can be a great warrior.

But, to return to the dance, Harold Laycock went on:

"Dancing was not too comfortable with the women partners wearing girdles of hand-grenades. I discovered that myself at one dance I attended over there. But in the main the dance of which the landing-craft boys spoke went off with success.

"But next morning came the sequel. A guerilla captain came striding on board one of the landing craft, and asked for the Commanding Officer. Then he led with a verbal left which staggered the landing-craft officer. 'One of your crew took home a girl Partisan from the dance last night,' he declared, 'WE HAVE HAD HER SHOT THIS MORNING. Will you shoot your sailor, or would you rather we did it?'

"The landing-craft C.O. did some mighty fast thinking, and replied in a hurry: 'Good lord! No, it's all right, thank you, we'll do it. Don't want you to have another messy job. Always like shooting our own men. Quartermaster! Pipe "Muster firing squad".'

"The Partisan captain went ashore quite satisfied with this example of British naval speed and efficiency. The guilty matelot was smuggled quietly back to Italy a few hours later.

"Of course there were very few incidents like that, but it goes to show. . . ."

I was not particularly surprised. After all I had met exactly the same mentality in North Russia. An officer serving ashore there told me how he had had a coat stolen out of his room. He grabbed an interpreter, and rushed around to the local Soviet boss. After being told that the prospect of recovery was nil, as the lost garment would by that time have been cut up for local uses, he was asked through the interpreter whether he suspected somebody.

"Good heavens, of course not," was his reply. "I came round here as soon as I discovered the loss."

The local Soviet boss spoke a few words, and the interpreter, turning to my friend, translated: "He says that if you suspect somebody, will you please send them round here, and he'll have them shot."

My brother officer was rocked by this, but more was to come. As he was going out the door, the Soviet boss spoke again.

"What does he say?" asked the British officer.

"He says," said the interpreter, "that perhaps it would be too much trouble to send suspects around here. If you suspect anyone, will you please shoot them yourself. It will be quite all right."

I had that account directly from the officer concerned while I was in North Russia. I do not want it to be considered as a political angle. After all, perhaps it is the secret of the strength displayed by the Russians and the Yugoslavs in the terrible struggle against the Nazis. Perhaps they are right, but it comes as a shock to a British mentality.

Harold also had an amusing slant on the Yugoslav fraternization problem.

"And, of course, it takes two to make a romance," he continued, speaking from considerable experience. "Even the superb technique for which the landing-craft types are renowned in matters of romance found more than its match in the taciturn lack of response among those Serbian Amazons. Some champion Romeos never got to first base.

"I once came upon a Partisanette staggering under a burden of mortars and machine-guns towards the ramp of a landing craft during a midnight invasion of an island. With proper wardroom chivalry, I offered assistance. She swiped me brusquely away. And, as there was no guardrail to the side of the ship, I joined the cool waters of the Adriatic—and the ranks of the 'non-fratters' at the same instant."

Lieutenant Laycock went on some interesting clandestine operations with the landing craft.

"There wasn't much time to 'frat' on actual operations in the landing craft," he said. "They were all Landing Craft Infantry—a sturdy little fleet, poking their ramps under unsuspecting German noses on some of the most difficult beaches of an archipelago bristling with navigational hazards. And their officers and men were too busy getting there and back to bill and coo with their passengers.

"There were trickier things, too, than uncharted islands, rocks, shoals and E-boats.

"Accustomed as they were to sea-borne invasions; the officers and ratings of the landing craft had to revise their ideas when they came under the aegis of Marshal Tito's commanders."

One thing which delighted the British officers was the lack of masses of signals and other paper which are a major pestilence in civilized fighting forces. Marshal Tito just did not indulge in "bumph", as this paper is popularly known.

Even before such lesser operations as the capture of Pantellaria, the men of the little ships had to pore over masses of "bumph", and, as I knew from experience of Sicily and the Riviera, the "bumph" for a major invasion is colossal and complicated.

But with Tito no cream of the mightiest military, naval and flying brains of two continents had been skimmed and churned for months in back rooms to plan operations.

"Split-second precision in departures, rendezvous and beaching were never on the time-table," said Harold Laycock. "For that matter they did not have a time-table in the normal sense.

"Instead of all that, there was an almost casual briefing in a dingy, wooden-floored office at the miniature naval headquarters on the quay at Komiza. The *dramatis personae* included: The British Senior Naval Officer for the proposed expedition; the commander of the guerillas; the commanding officers of the landing craft, and the M.T.B.s and M.G.B.s which would cover the expedition. And, finally, a sheepish-looking Serb in civilian clothes.

"The British S.N.O. speaks: 'You live on Sholta?'

"The sheepish Serb nods, and the guerilla Commander takes over his story from him. 'He came over from Sholta yesterday. There are 300 Germans on the island. These are their positions, and . . .'

"The group of officers move over to a map of the island of Sholta on the wall. The sheepish Serb's information is checked against our own intelligence and air reconnaissance photographs. Moon phases and weather reports are studied. In a splutter of Serbo-Croat the guerilla Commander and the sheepish Serb return to the map. Turning to the British S.N.O., the guerilla Commander points to an L-shaped inlet on Sholta's southern coast, and says: 'His brother and some friends will be on the slopes here every night at ten o'clock from tomorrow. They'll give us the latest news and act as guides.'

"That is the way one Dalmatian D-day was chattily fixed. I was an interested onlooker."

Harold went on to describe one of the great characters of this fierce little sideline war. He was one of those old warhorses who, no matter what their age and in face of all official objections, manages to find the hottest spot in any war. This officer had been an Admiral of the Royal Navy, long since on the retired list.

With the outbreak of this war, he battled his way back from the retired list, and was now serving as a Commander, R.N.

Continuing his account of the landing-craft operation on which he sailed on this occasion, Laycock went on:

"There was another L.C.I. to arrive at Komiza before the navigational details could be worked out and the times arranged. She came in next morning.

"Now, the jetty at Komiza required you to make an awkward ninety-degree turn in order to berth your ship. Another thing about the jetty at Komiza is that, more often than not, it had an ex-Admiral of the Royal Navy standing on it. Returned from the retired list, he was now a Commander, R.N. He was characterized by an adventurous spirit which had taken him on more amphibious commando operations than any other naval officer in the Mediterranean—and a shepherd's crook without which he was never seen.

"He was still sternly imbued with all the reverence of R.N. officers for the neat handling of ships.

"And so the L.C.I. came in, and the ex-Admiral scrutinized it with an experienced eye.

"Now, whether the young R.N.V.R. lieutenant in command of the L.C.I. had his attention distracted by the ex-Admiral's crook or by the kaleidoscopic splendour of the ribbons on the ex-Admiral's chest, will probably never be known. But one thing is certain: the young R.N.V.R. officer certainly was unsighted by something.

"As he swung confidently into the home straight, as it were, rounding that beastly L-bend, the bows of his little ship seemed unaccountably attracted towards the ex-Admiral. In a moment it began to lob large and small pieces of Komiza jetty in all directions around the ex-Admiral, his crook, ribbons and the warm Dalmatian sunshine.

"One eye-witness told me that the ex-Admiral became airborne in his ascent to the bridge of that L.C.I. I think this may be exaggerated, but there is little doubt that all previously existing records for the ascent of ex-Admirals from Komiza jetty to the bridges of L.C.I.s were probably halved.

"The subsequent monologue on the bridge of this particular L.C.I. was veiled in a thin, purple haze which, an hour later, thickened to a pall of purple smoke as the ex-Admiral learned from Operations Room that this same L.C.I. was to carry the more important guerilla personnel to the invasion of the Island of Sholta.

"The ex-Admiral need not have worried. I was on board the offending L.C.I. for the Sholta raid. We knocked along through the quiet moonlight, with a Landing Craft—Assault, in tow astern. I think the lads in the L.C.A. were having an unpleasant ride where our wake churned the swell, and made them bob and bounce like a cork.

"Soon enough Sholta loomed up in the moonlight, looking grim and barren. It was obvious from the moment we entered the L-shaped cove that this was going to be no easy beaching. These Tito guerillas flattered us with their belief that a British naval officer and ship could accomplish miracles. This was a minor miracle we were now performing. The ninety-degree turn to port led into a short gully almost exactly the width of two L.C.I.s.

"One of our craft was already tucked against the cliffs on the starboard hand. Our job was to beach along her port side without bashing in either her hull or ours, and at the same time avoiding spiking ourselves on those wolfish-looking rocks that threatened our own hull from the other side.

"Through the deceptive shadows thrown by the glare of the moonlight, our young R.N.V.R. lieutenant made an immaculate run-in. By an inch we missed scraping the other ship, and not a rock dented our hull. Which just goes to show what an L.C.I. can do when there are no ex-Admirals with shepherds' crooks around.

"It was then that I made a great discovery about the Partisans. To my complete astonishment they did not think that this perfect beaching was as good as they would wish.

"The strange thing about Yugoslav Partisans was this. Toughest of warriors, with a tradition for living on gore and sudden death for centuries, they could never stomach getting their feet wet. They would fight to the drop, but not with wet feet.

"Our Adriatic L.C.I. skippers discovered this very early in the Dalmatian operations. The general idea thereafter was to crash on all available knots a couple of cables' distance from the beach and finish up with most things except the kedge-anchor out of the water. This was considered by the Partisans to be an eminently satisfactory beaching.

"Of course that is a slight exaggeration—but not much.

"In our little cove on Sholta, the circumstances were definitely against such a technique, and when the ramps were lowered, there were a couple of yards of thigh-deep water to the shingle. Only when a

couple of British able seamen stood waist-deep in the sea near the end of the ramps, and worked together like a human catapult to project our passengers ashore, could the Partisans be persuaded to land.

"Once the disembarkation had been completed in these invasions, it was the usual routine for the L.C.I.s to disperse into sheltered bays of some adjacent island not occupied by Huns. There they would lie hidden throughout the day, returning to the beaches after dark to pick up the raiders and their Hun prisoners.

"In this kind of operation there was always uncertainty—and that not due to the enemy. The day would often bring half a dozen contradictory signals affecting the schedule. It was the way of the Partisans. One of them might discover a batch of cousins he had not seen for a few months. Time out for gossip—after that get on with the war. Or perhaps others would find a prize, a store of their favourite prosheko wine which would have to be humped down to the beach, come Hun, hell or high water.

"Little things like this often held up the programme and made life more of an adventure for the landing craft in those adventurous waters and days.

"After a spot of experience in those parts I feel no surprise at hearing that one British senior naval officer, reporting to his Flag Officer upon the first guerilla raid in his area, made the signal:

"'Everything going according to plan—if they have a plan.'

"Air attack and E-boats were the main dangers our Adriatic L.C.I.s had to contend with. There was a certain amount of opposition to be expected from shore batteries during the raids, but this was never a major danger. The R.A.F. and the Light Coastal Forces saw to that. If the L.C.I.s were at all troubled by these coastal batteries, the R.A.F. were whistled up, and they soon plastered the batteries so thoroughly that the Hun was glad to keep his head down. And just to make sure the M.T.B.s and M.G.B.s would move in to close range and spray the enemy gunners.

"The Luftwaffe used to try to retaliate with dawn raids on the harbour at Komiza. Several mornings a week two or three Messerschmitts would come sweeping down on the little Yugoslav harbour, but they had an amazing lack of success in their efforts to get at the landing craft.

"From before dusk until after dawn all naval vessels in Komiza harbour used to disperse under the shelter of the cliffs which surrounded the harbour. These cliffs, north and east, formed a right-angled bay, and the Messerschmitts always flew a course which cut this right-angle like the cross stroke of a letter A, but they constantly varied their direction of approach. One morning they would come in very low, flying south-east. The next morning they would come roaring down but flying north-west over the anchorage.

"To counter these tactics our ships switched their dispersal positions at random: one evening lying under the cover of the north cliff, and the next or the evening after that switching to the east cliff. It was completely haphazard, just as were the attacks of the German aircraft. Yet,

by some phenomenal chance, the Navy had always guessed right. Up till the time I left Vis not once did the Messerschmitts find our craft against the cliff at which they were aiming on that particular morning.

"By the time they had swept over the sheltered ships, searching for their targets, they were far too late to drop their bombs or spray their cannon shells. They never came back for a second run. Our ack-ack fire was far too hot for their liking.

"On the whole our L.C.I. boys had a happy time among the Partisans.

"There was enough work and excitement to prevent the ratings from getting chokker, and they were certainly seeing life from a completely new angle.

"But Partisans were not their only cargo. Some of our crack Commando units, Royal Marines in particular, were used in more important operations along the Dalmatian coast, and later down to Greece and its islands.

"Those were welcome field days for the Commanding Officers of the landing craft. With crack British Commandos on board they could be assured of a prompt schedule well kept, and also plenty of happy 'fratting' on the way to the job and coming home."

That is a glimpse of one of the finest jobs done by landing craft of the Mediterranean Command.

Later in the Italian campaign these square box-like L.C.V.s, though only minor landing craft designed for landing troops and vehicles in favourable weather conditions, showed their versatility and the daring of their crews.

This was after the Eighth Army had captured Ravenna, a port on the Adriatic coast of Italy. It was the Royal Navy's job to clear this port of mines, so that the supplies could begin to flow forward by the sea route and keep up with the Eighth Army ashore. The Navy, which had acted as the sea outriders of the famous Eighth all the way from El Alamein and become almost a part of the Eighth in many ways, was not going to let those comrades in khaki down now.

The trouble was that the waters of Ravenna and its approaches were so shallow, and also stiff with mines. The Germans had done a fine job of mining, knowing that we could not get our regular sweepers at them for a start. Not only did this menace supply lines, but it made it dangerous for our destroyers to enter these waters to do bombardments in support of the troops.

Fleet minesweepers could not make a start on the mines until a certain amount of clearance of the surface levels had been carried out. Even my old friends of Ischia, the minesweeping motor-launches, although small enough and of shallow draft, found that the mines in the port of Ravenna were laid in such shallow waters and so near the surface, that they could not sweep the area without accepting the certainty of heavy casualties. This was something like the situation off Elba, only a lot worse.

Improvisation was called for, and that is something the Navy can always do. And when it comes to improvisation who more natural

to choose than the landing-craft boys. I have been trying to think of a job which my friends of the landing craft have not done, and the only one I can think of is to fight a Fleet action on their own. They have done everything else, including the entirely landing-craft invasion job of Elba. Of course they did let three China river gunboats in on that operation, but that was a generous gesture to give the gunboat chaps a bit of target practise. After all, the L.C.G.s did a large part of the bombardment work.

For the Ravenna job the L.C.V.s (Landing Craft—Vehicle) were called upon.

These craft were originally designed for smooth-water work close inshore, with the capacity for one good-sized tank or a group of assault troops. In the Mediterranean I had seen them used mainly by the Americans for running around anchorages, carting stores and serving as liberty boats.

But now a flotilla of L.C.V.s, commanded by Sub-Lieutenant R. S. Mortimer, R.N.V.R., was fitted out for minesweeping, and began to work in the open sea with the larger sweepers. A day at sea in these craft is almost like spending a day in an open boat. There is practically no shelter on board, as they are too small for that, and their square bow, which is a landing ramp, shovels up the spray in any sort of a sea. They also take handling in a seaway, for their square shape makes them unwieldy and awkward at the best of times.

To ensure the discomfort of the crews, it was still winter when the job had to be done. And—as the men of the Fifth and Eighth Armies will tell you with plenty of trimmings, this tourist slogan of “Sunny Italy” is all the bunk. The Adriatic in winter can be as nasty as the Channel—as cold and wet.

But the minesweeping flotilla of L.C.V.s went to their dangerous and difficult job with a will, making a bit of naval history in the process. Each craft was commanded by a Petty Officer or Leading Seaman, with one officer in charge of four craft. The four or five seamen on board each craft had to stream the heavy sweeps and carry out the sweeping operations by themselves. It was something new to them, and had plenty of hazards, but they made a great job of it. By the time they had completed it after working days at sea with the larger minesweepers they claimed a “bag” of nearly thirty mines.

And so, in close support of the Eighth Army, these craft and their bigger and more professional brothers entered Ravenna very soon after its capture. To the Motor Minesweepers and the Minesweeping M.L.s this was the end of a chapter. Long before Ravenna fell they had swept as close as they could under the muzzles of the German guns, and on one occasion they had even taken part in a bombardment of the defences of the port—a pleasant interlude for the gunners of the minesweepers.

It is a tradition of the Senior Service that praise should not be lavish, so the lads of the minesweeping flotilla of L.C.V.s knew how well they had done when Commander Kaye-Perrin, R.N.V.R., then Commander Minesweeping for the Adriatic, said;



"The credit for clearing the port of Ravenna must go entirely to the officers and men of the L.C.V.s. They did a fine job of work."

Like most landing-craft types, the officers and ratings of these midget minesweepers were mere youngsters, the average age of the officers being twenty-two.

Minesweeping is rated as a nasty job at the best of times, but with the discomfort of an L.C.V. in a seaway coupled with the strain of constant and immediate danger of death, this task done by landing-craft men should provide a gallant little paragraph to naval history. Yes—the landing-craft lads can do anything, and without any fanfare of trumpets.

It has often struck me as a bit unreasonable that the public should look with such awe and respect upon the Commandos. In part their title has something to do with it. Yet they would be nothing without their sea-borne "oppos", the lads of the landing craft, the commandos afloat. These naval officers and ratings, upon whom the limelight has so rarely played, have to show an equal level of courage, skill, endurance and initiative—and they take it all in their stride and with considerable success. I think the Commandos would be the first to admit this, but it should be more widely recognized.

Of course we could hardly expect the limelight to have been focused on some of the work performed by landing craft. I am speaking of "cloak and dagger" missions. Creeping into enemy waters to land agents behind the enemy lines has been but one of the secret jobs performed most efficiently by landing craft.

That hardy old Anglo-Norwegian broadcaster, Mr. Rasmussen, had some experience of this in the Adriatic. "Uncle Ras", as he was popularly known in every ship in which he sailed, endeared himself to the landing-craft types—and all others—with whom he sailed by his youthful energy and good humour. "Uncle Ras" and his guitar will long be a happy memory with many naval officers of the Mediterranean Station. He held an honorary commission as a lieutenant in the Royal Norwegian Navy, and I doubt if any other lieutenant in any Navy has seen more action than "Uncle Ras".

This is how he explained it to me. As a B.B.C. broadcaster, doing much work for our propaganda service as well as for the ordinary programmes, he considered that he should share the risks and discomforts of the men whose guest he was. He considered that he would not be earning the good money he was paid unless he did this. Yet "Uncle Ras" was old enough to be entitled to take things easier, but he was built of solid teak—except for the head—and was hardier than most men half his age. Perhaps it was his early days as a "windjammer" sailor which had given him his hardiness.

As he sailed on many occasions with landing craft, I think they will agree that he earned the very honourable title of "landing-craft type". One of his most cherished experiences was in a landing craft on a "cloak and dagger" mission behind the enemy lines.

Soon after we had established ourselves in southern Italy, this landing craft was sent on its secret mission to a point on the Adriatic coast well

behind the German lines. "Uncle Ras" rode along with his recording apparatus. Under cover of darkness the landing craft stole right in to the beach. They got so close to the coastal road at this point that "Ras" was able to get recordings of German transport on the move, and even of distant German voices. I do not know what happened to these recordings when they returned to England, but they are a good souvenir of the "cloak and dagger" work done by the landing-craft boys.

For a prize example of this kind of work by landing craft I am partly indebted to Lieutenant-Commander Geoffrey Snagge, R.N.V.R., commander of a squadron of L.C.T. He prized it out of a shyly reluctant R.N.V.R. lieutenant, the hero of the occasion, who is one of the very few men of whom I have heard who was definitely shy of publicity and would honestly hate to see his name in print. As a compromise I will give only the initials of the young officer to whom the credit is due for this fine story—Lieutenant H.A.D. As it was originally supplied for the benefit of naval publicity, and issued to Service publications in the Mediterranean and *The Times of Malta*, I will not be stealing the brains of H.A.D. if I reproduce it here in its excellent and highly amusing style.

#### POPSKI'S PRIVATE ARMY

It began with a figure in khaki uniform putting his head in the wardroom door, and saying: "P.P.A." Just like that.

"Ah," said the skipper of the L.C.T., "yes. Just the man. You go fetch tug, Capisto?"

"Tug? No—P.P.A."

"Look," said the skipper, speaking slowly for the benefit of the foreigner, "you bring tug. I see officer in charge. He say O.K."

"I'm from P.P.A., old man."

"Good lord, are you English?"

"Certainly."

"Well, what are you. Captain, sergeant, general or what?"

"Captain, old boy. Don't wear rank in this outfit, P.P.A."

"What the devil is this P.P.A.?"

"Popski's Private Army. I say, aren't you in the picture? Haven't you been told?"

The soldier came in; took a glass into his right hand. The scene was Manfredonia, then the Allies' most northerly port on the Adriatic Coast of Italy, and, for the next few minutes, the misunderstandings were ironed out.

An operation had been approved by the C-in-C. The L.C.T. was to convey Popski's Private Army to a beach ninety-three miles behind the German lines. There it was to leave them. They were in the habit of being left like that. In fact, they had fought three years of the war behind the enemy's lines, beginning in Egypt.

Late that day "Popski" himself arrived. A mysterious man, wearing for the moment the uniform of a major of the British Army, and nearly two rows of decorations. Shaven head, heavy form, ponderous authority, perfect English with a fascinating foreign edge to it, choice cigars and a complete contempt for the enemy. That was, and is, "Major Popski". And his army actually was a private army. His exploits had become so unorthodox that the War Office apparently could find no regulations to apply to him. Logically, they had established him and his men as an army of their own.

And the men. Picked from every unit in the British Empire. One out of every eighty applicants chosen; and every volunteer forfeited all previous rank and began again as private. No extra pay, just the thrill of fighting a war as no one else in the Army fights it,

Twelve jeeps were to be taken. Super-jeeps fitted with a mass of fighting and technical devices, most of them secret, making each one the soldier's dream of a fighting machine. They made a force of about sixty men with four officers, including a phlegmatic Corsican who refused to respond to English, as he found it too difficult.

Details were worked out in the L.C.T.'s wardrobe under the benevolent eye of a Commander, R.N., who disclaimed any purpose other than listening.

(I suspect that I know that Commander, a stocky officer of naval Commandos who vegetated for a while as an N.O.I.C. on the Adriatic coast.)

First, the beach. It was a very small beach, only fifty yards wide. Could that be found after dark, more than a hundred miles away? The skipper thought it could. At the stated time? Yes.

Excellent. Then the Commandos would land and form a bridgehead, while Popski's force drove ashore, and into Italy, to stir up trouble for friend Fritz. There would be a partisan on the beach, and he would flash a red light.

Any sand-bars? The skipper was shown a hand-drawn chart, marked with soundings. The beach had been explored, and the water was clear of obstructions, and ran as deep as five feet almost on the water's edge.

And the railway train. A railway line passed along the beach about eighty yards inland. A train went up and down. It would have to be watched for.

"Now," said the skipper, "we could shoot that up."

"No, no," cried the Commander, "the C-in-C. has not been told. If you want to shoot trains, you must tell the C-in-C."

"But, my dear Commander," protested the Major, "a train. The temptation is too great!"

"No, no. Really this operation must be secret. We can't have L.C.T.s shooting at trains in the middle of it. Besides, the C-in-C. . . ."

"But, Commander. It is sublime. I go ashore, and then the ship shoots up the train, and the enemy think that is the whole object of the operation. So I and my men, they do not look for us. Eh?"

"And, sir, if I get the Major ashore, I can come off, turn stern to, and give the train a terrific pasting as it goes by."

"Oh well . . . if your guns are pointing in that direction, and they happen to go off, I suppose there is nothing I can do about it."

The M.L. skipper, who was to act as escort, was also gleeful. He had a new set of Bofors guns that had not yet had a decent target.

Eventually everything was settled.

"Good," said the Major. "Let us go and have a party."

It was dark and calm when the L.C.T. passed silently between the harbour moles, and an inquisitive spectator might have been mildly surprised to see her turn her bows northward. There was nothing up there but Germans.

Far out to sea, out of sight of everything but the mountain peaks; every revolution being counted, a finely-tuned log, set being taken into account, wind estimated—shades of H.M.S. King Alfred.

And so, through the day and into the next evening. The M.L. was ranging far ahead on the starboard bow. Nothing else moved, no ships, no aircraft . . . and 2000 hours, the calculations showed that the one-ship force was nearly there. Three hours early.

"Which would you prefer, Major—to be positive you are on the right beach and take the chance of being seen? Or not be seen, but perhaps be a little out on this beach."

"For me, I say I would rather be seen perhaps, but make the right place."

The skipper signalled the M.L. Both ships hove to, and the M.L. departed to close

the land, and have a look-see. Meanwhile the skipper cautiously kept his craft end-on to the shore, with the faint hope of making her less easy to see. With a beam of 38 feet it was certainly a faint hope.

"What happens, Major, if the Huns spot you? I mean, you've got quite a cavalcade of transport here."

"Ah, they do not see us. We are careful. Sometimes they do. Then we kill them. All, you understand. They must not talk."

That seems fairly conclusive, and by this time, anyway, the M.L. was coming back. It was the right beach. The mountain peaks provided fixes. (Wonder if there's any Huns up there taking fixes on us?)

The sun went down, and blue-black darkness came up. No moon. The L.C.T. turned shorewards, and the run-in commenced. The Commandos were getting out their Tommy-guns, giving them a last loving polish.

The Private Army was tuning up its engines; the ship's gunners, steel-helmeted, peered ahead through the gun-shields.

2250 . . . 2255 . . . 2257 . . . "There. There it is, sir. The light. I saw it."  
"Starboard five. 'Midships. Steady." And the tiny red light was flashing urgently dead ahead.

Judging the distance to the beach . . . then a lurch . . . the ship had slithered over a sand-bank. Ominous. Another violent swing to port. She had hit another. (Thought they said it was clear water . . . there's the surf . . . slow ahead together. . . . LET GO . . . and the anchor thundered over the stern. . . . Stop together . . .) A soft slither and the ship had beached.

The door went down, plumb at the feet of the man with the red light. And the time . . . 2300 exactly.

"Marvellous," said the Major, "marvellous. I did not think it could be done. Good-bye and thank you."

That should have been the end, but it was only the beginning.

There was a road along the beach, about sixty yards inland, and along that road was travelling a series of bright and jolly headlights. The happy Hun, retreating along the road at an altogether improper time. Long convoys of them. Where there should have been no Hun there were masses of him. Awkward.

And the ship began to swing to port . . . INTO the wind. The engines were brought in to hold her straight. The impulse was coming from the river to starboard. The outfall was pushing the ship broadside to the beach in water that was seamed in sandbanks.

The pageant of enemy traffic, that was passing so that brake-noises were audible, was spoiling things for the Major. A patrol trotted off, dodged across the road in a convenient break between headlights, and explored a road further inland. In thirty minutes they were back. That was blocked too. Traffic everywhere, retreating in masses.

Then a whining scream and CRASH. What the blazes . . . just the R.A.F., nice chaps in their own way, but not welcome here. They had begun to bomb the bridge five hundred yards away.

So, there were Germans, there were bombs, there was a current that was now fighting the ship's maximum engine power, and there were sandbanks.

"Captain," said the Major, "I am sorry. I must cancel the operation. I cannot get my vehicles ashore."

"Up door!" It came slowly up. CRASH. . . . Wheeeew. CRASH . . . the bombs came down. And the traffic stopped. (Not so good. A few of those Huns just have to get out to paddle in the water, and they find us.)

"I think they will see us, Major."

"Oh, they do see us. Who could not see us. But in the German Army they say, 'I am lorry driver. Ships are not my business.' So they do not interfere."

Heave in the anchor . . . full astern together . . . emergency full astern together. But the anchor came home. Sixty fathoms of wire dragged home through the sand.

Emergency power on the port and starboard engines to straighten the ship, now forced to a hideous angle with the beach. And still she gave way to the tide, inch by inch.

"I don't think we're going to get off, Major."

"No? She will not come?"

The boat's crew tried to take the anchor away again. They pulled for fifteen minutes and made six yards. And time was going by. At any moment the Hun might come pattering down the beach, and find a whole ship and all her gear and equipment. To spend time fighting to get her off? Or destroy her before the enemy sweeps down? A very fine point of judgment. A limit must be set upon the effort to save her, lest by so doing she is preserved only to be captured.

Then . . . BRILLIANCE . . . white, radiant, blazing light.

Every man froze. The R.A.F. again, dropping flares to see if they had hit the bridge. And not just one flare, but more and more.

At 0100 the order was given to burn and destroy. The M.L. could not be contacted, and, in any case, with no winch she could not take a wire, and, if she could, no M.L. would heave 550 inert tons off this sandtrap.

Food and arms were got up. The ship's company changed into their thickest clothing and boots, and the 140 men were split up into twelve parties. Object: Get ashore and hide until the Eighth Army came up (which they did not achieve until six weeks later).

Every order the skipper gave was obeyed like lightning. The discipline of the Army units was perfect.

Then the skipper saw a blacker patch than the surrounding blackness. The M.L. She had approached and grounded 500 yards out. The skipper paddled over on a float.

He promptly agreed to wait to take off Popski's unit, all specialists, and stoutly swore he could take everybody. He finally promised to leave at daybreak with what men could be transferred to him by that time. But he had no boat. The L.C.T. had one dinghy and two Carley floats.

The Commando captain was put in charge of the boat, and pushed off with five men with full equipment before he could be checked in the darkness.

"Skins only to be saved," was the order and all appeals to be allowed to take this or that were sternly refused.

The floats pushed off with Army personnel. One or two confident swimmers were given permission to get away . . . but the boat did not come back. Not for an hour. The five hearty Commandos had all stepped out of it on the same side, and turned it over. At 0300 there were still 84 men on board, all holding their treasured, private and personal automatic weapons, watching the still steaming traffic on the road, and smoking the Major's cigars which he had distributed.

It became apparent that all swimmers of any calibre at all would have to attempt the 500 yards swim. At the Skipper's order, and in an incredibly short time, all inner tubes were removed from the vehicles. They made fine lifebuoys, and after each had been questioned as to his confidence, fifty-three took off.

Charges were set on the ruined engines, on all the vehicles and upon the ship's hull. All her instruments were smashed, and all her papers, even the NAAFI receipts, were burned. The beer ration was distributed, the rum set under guard, and cigarettes given away in cartons. The rearguard were having the time of their lives, in addition to now possessing four automatic rifles each should the enemy at last trot down the sand and see what was going on.

At dawn's first crimson streaks, the skipper explored the ship, took down his ensign, and left, with the fuses set for one hour.

And the M.L.s engines were turning over as he gripped the handrail, feet still in the water.

"Buck up," yelled the M.L., and turned hard a-port with his engines roaring. . . .

The train . . . it was coming! The Bofors burst into their banging stammer, and pieces began to fly; shells curved into the train. It stopped. More shells burst on and around it . . . and then, away, the M.L. flat out with officers and men on board. Every man had made it, and every man had been picked up.

Fourteen hours later they were in Manfredonia.

Thank you, Lieutenant H.A.D., that is one of the best stories I have heard or read in this war. No exaggeration, no heroics, just a straightforward picture of an episode, and, typically, with plenty of emphasis on the soldier side of the business.

So there we are. We can add "cloak and dagger" to the uses of L.C.T.s. I would hardly have expected such a hulking, awkward, lumbering craft like an L.C.T. to take part in such a delicate operation. But you live and learn.

## CHAPTER XIV

### MED-ITATION

HOMEWARD bound! A comfortable troopship though crowded. The Union Castle's most modern ship. Plenty of time for meditation, especially in the long dark nights when I cannot sleep even with the assistance of luminal.

I'm sorry I did not see "Tackline" or "Pat" before I left. But "Tackline" is always dashing between Naples and the Adriatic when he is not away on operations with his flotilla, and "Pat" was in some hospital. Not the same one as myself. Talking of hospitals reminds me of the big laugh I gave one doctor.

He gave me a thorough going over, and then sorrowfully informed me:

"Sorry, old chap. You've got V.D.H."

I was indignant.

"Don't be ridiculous, Doc. I have not even kissed a girl since I left home. I'm a happily married man and intend to stay that way."

He was helpless with laughter for a minute, and then I demanded to know what was the big joke.

"Good lord," he spluttered, "haven't you ever heard of V.D.H.—Valvular Disease of the Heart—nothing to do with what you're thinking."

I joined in the laugh out of sheer relief.

Homeward bound! Impatiently, eagerly you look forward to getting home. And at the same time you keep looking back to old scenes and old friends, living over in memory again the highlights of those hectic and tedious days, those grim and gay incidents.

Who was it gave the Navy the laugh of a lifetime at Naples? Of course—Captain Geoffrey Barnard in command of the cruiser *Aurora*. After returning from the Riviera invasion I went around the naval anchorage at Naples to visit the cruisers and hear their end of the job. I asked him about the incident which had given the naval types in the Mediterranean a big laugh a few weeks earlier.

The *Aurora* had been sailing from Algiers to Naples, and a large party

of "Wrens", detailed for duty at A.F.H.Q., Caserta, after its transfer from Algiers, were put on board the cruiser as passengers for the crossing. They were given certain shipboard duties to keep them busy, but it was while the cruiser was approaching Naples that Captain Barnard had his supreme brainwave. The *Aurora* would enter the Fleet anchorage at Naples with the Wrens manning the fo'c'sle in proper naval fashion.

As the cruiser came up to her position in the anchorage, the officers and ratings in adjacent warships goggled in disbelief. It was "impossible". Dressed in their smart white tropical rig, the Wrens were strung out along the fo'c'sle facing outboard, manning the fo'c'sle in proper naval fashion. The only men in sight were the First Lieutenant at his station in the eyes of the ship—at the point of the V formed by the two lines of Wrens—and the officers on the bridge, including Captain Barnard.

"No man was allowed on the upper deck for the great occasion," Captain Barnard told me. "We even made the blacksmith [who knocks out the pin from the stopper to release the anchor] lie down out of sight with his hammer.

"You should have seen the officers and ratings in the other ships. First they stared in amazement, and then I could see them calling down to their friends below to come up and see the sight of the century."

The *Aurora*, as one of the cruisers I had seen from my look-out on top of the hill before Hyères, had distinguished herself as the spearhead of the great naval bombardment which knocked out the big batteries protecting Toulon harbour early in the invasion.

In the final, shattering attack, although he was far from being the senior officer present, Captain Barnard found himself with authority delegated by an American Admiral, directing this bombardment by British, American and French battleships, cruisers and destroyers.

This attack, a furious bombardment lasting an hour, was directed upon the German batteries on the Island of St. Mandrier, which guards Toulon Harbour. It was carried out by the British battleship *Ramillies*, the French battleship *Lorraine*, the British cruisers *Aurora* and *Sirius*, the French cruisers *Montcalm* and *Georges Leygues*, with the British destroyer *Lookout*, the French destroyers *Le Fantasque* and *Le Malin*, three United States destroyers and the French torpedo-boat *Simoun*, with the Chief of Staff of the Free French Navy on board.

Strongest of the formidable batteries which were blotted out by this attack were two French naval guns of about 13.5-inch calibre. These had been removed by the Germans from a French battleship in Toulon harbour, and mounted in a twin turret on land, strongly protected by concrete. These twin guns were quickly christened by the men of the *Aurora* "Big Willie", just as they nicknamed a lesser battery on the Island "Old Magenta" because of the colour of the smoke plumes which shells from this battery gave off when they struck the water.

Of course, *Aurora*, with her six-inch guns, could hardly expect to cope with "Big Willie", though during the day of August 25 she kept banging away from time to time at these formidable guns. It was left

to the French battleship *Lorraine* to administer the knock-out blow to "Big Willie".

At six o'clock on the evening of August 25 the big bombardment began, the attacking ships lying in a great arc to seaward of St. Mandrier, with the battleships way out, the cruisers about eight miles offshore, and the destroyers working closer in. The lone British destroyer, *Lookout*, worked valiantly to protect both *Aurora* and *Sirius* with a smokescreen. At the end of an hour's terrific bombardment the enemy batteries were all silenced, though the excitable Gallic *Simoun* continued to shoot for a few minutes after the "Cease Fire" signal had been made, throwing in a few extra rounds for luck.

Captain Barnard gave high praise to the American destroyers *Eberle* and *Hendrick* for their excellent service in laying smokescreens and the spirited way in which they engaged shore batteries. He also paid a particular tribute to the *Lorraine* for her "masterly shooting" which alone made the final operation possible, and also because on August 22, when the *Aurora* was leaving the bay after a bombardment, bringing "Big Willie's" splashes with her, we had seen the *Lorraine* deliberately steam into the bay on our engaged side and draw the enemy's fire.

This bombardment was the climax to eleven days of hard work off the Riviera, on seven days of which the *Aurora* carried out bombardments. In 21 shoots she fired 973 rounds, her targets including enemy gun positions, beach defences, mortar batteries, strongpoints, artillery observation posts and troop concentrations.

So the often forgotten men whom Petty Officer Day, Captain of A turret, mentioned to me certainly earned their praise. These were the men in the shell-handling rooms and magazines in the depths of the ship below the waterline. There, sealed away from sight and sound of action, they sweated in an airless atmosphere to keep the big guns speaking.

"It was sweltering hot work for those men," said Petty Officer Day, "and I was surprised to find how cheerfully they took it. Had it been a practise they would have been indulging in a good healthy moan, but when it came to bombarding in earnest they were as happy as could be. 'As long as we're helping the lads ashore, that's all we care,' was their comment."

Other unsung heroes of the occasion, as Captain Barnard pointed out, were the engine-room people.

Marine Burke told me a story of the devotion to duty shown by four musicians of the cruiser's Royal Marines band. When, owing to a hitch, the shell-hoisting machinery of the after turret manned by the "Royals" broke down for a while, these four musicians, who normally operate the great ranging and training table in the depths of the ship beneath the bridge, and are not supposed to do work which might impair their hands and ears as musicians, volunteered on their own initiative to help keep the turret working in proper Royal Marines style. They went aft and helped to manhandle ammunition to the guns so well that the rate of fire was maintained until the hoisting machinery could be repaired.



Those days off the Riviera also supplied the *Aurora* with some amusing signals.

On one occasion the cruiser offered to escort the China river gunboat, H.M.S. *Scarab*, which was standing in to carry out a bombardment. With great dignity the *Scarab* replied:

"Thank you, but my guns are six-inch repeat six-inch."

A couple of amusing signals were also received from the French cruiser *La Gloire*. On one occasion the French ship signalled, "Request we land liberty men." Just as though it were all a picnic. Soon afterwards, when the *Aurora's* sister ship, the *Dido*, was rather monopolizing the shooting, the French cruiser signalled to the *Aurora*: "Terry [Captain of the *Dido*] is working too hard. We should have shooting ration cards."

One of the most agitated men in the *Aurora* when she bombarded the Riviera coast was Petty Officer Clifford Dungar. In the days of peace he used to spend his holidays with French friends who lived in a Riviera village. When the *Aurora* arrived off this particular section of the coast, he immediately recognized it as a place of happy memories, and he was particularly anxious not to see the houses of his friends blown sky-high by his own ship. But all was well, for there was no need to fire upon this particular place to dislodge the enemy.

In answer to the *Aurora's* proud record, the *Dido* boasted: "We set the ball rolling."

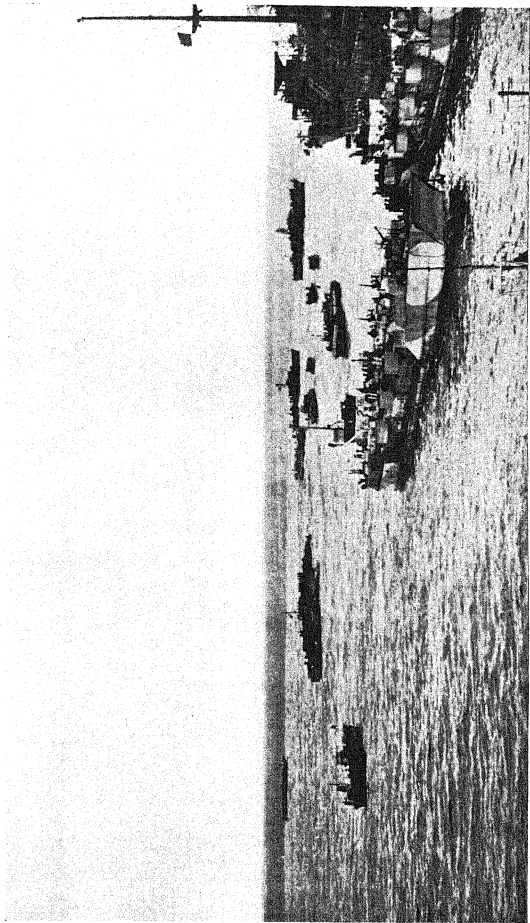
She was the first British cruiser to come into play in this operation, though, as it happened, she was not actually called upon for supporting fire in the dark hours before the daylight assault. Soon after midnight, in the early hours of D-day, the *Dido* had to stand close inshore to cover the successful surprise landing by the Bataillon de Choc, the French Commando troops, who swiftly knocked out the menacing German battery on Cape Negre—and incidentally saved us from an uncomfortable time in the waiting area on the morning of D-day. Had there been trouble with this battery, the *Dido* was there to give the support of her six-inch guns to the French Commandos.

The *Dido* did spend three days giving gunfire support to the French Commandos as they dealt with the Germans in this area after a highly successful initial landing. This often required a very fine degree of shooting, particularly when the Commandos called for fire to check one determined enemy counter-attack. At this stage French and Germans were at such close quarters that the Gunnery Officer of the *Dido*, Lieutenant Synnot, R.A.N., of Queensland, had to make very sure of his range to avoid shelling the Commandos as well as the enemy.

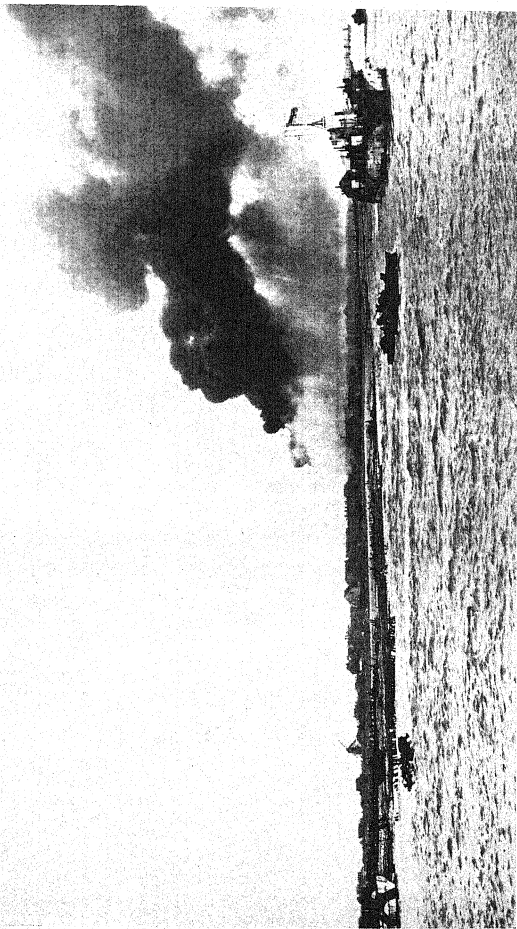
On this occasion the cruiser fired for thirty minutes, sending in ninety-nine rounds to smash the enemy counter-attack. Then the Forward Observation Officer ashore reported:

"Counter-attack held at fifty yards. Revolvers came in useful. Many thanks. Now at least fifty prisoners."

The continued accuracy of the *Dido's* shooting was reflected in a number of signals from the F.O.O. ashore. At one time the Commandos



NORMANDY: The motor-launch (just beyond the bridge of the Landing Craft (Flak) in the foreground) is bringing the King ashore to visit his troops in Normandy.



WAR AHEAD; Landing Craft (Tank) approach a beach as an enemy stronghold burns ahead of them.

had to call down fire on a village where the Germans were assembled in strength. Soon afterwards came the signal from the shore:

"You have destroyed about half the village. Nicely for the moment, thank you."

After another successful shoot later in the day, the F.O.O. signalled "We hope you have interrupted the Germans' evening meal."

Keen rivalry existed between the *Aurora* and the *Dido*, and the *Didos* were a little envious of the big bombardment rôle subsequently given to the *Aurora*. During the early stages of the operation, however, the *Aurora* arrived in the vicinity of the *Dido* while the latter was carrying out a bombardment. Across flashed the signal from *Aurora*:

"Is this a private party or can anybody join in?"

Homeward bound! Looking forward and thinking back. A few very personal impressions of an invasion.

One funny little memory of that American L.S.T. What is luxury? A hot shower. Water restrictions had necessarily to be practised on the way from Naples to the Riviera, but on the last evening on board hot showers were turned on specially. I had never before thought of a hot shower as a real luxury, but it was surprising how that little concession bucked everyone up. It is nice to be clean and fresh to start an invasion.

Hats off to the sappers. That invasion gave me the experience of walking over ground where the mines had not yet been cleared.

How on earth do the "pongoes" do it. It was the most terrifying experience of my life. Every step was an agony, wondering if the next one would set off a mine and blow me to blazes. I literally sweated, and profusely.

Strange how those experiences stay with you. On my first "civvy" holiday for five years, I stepped off a road to enter a little copse. Then I found myself standing still and looking around. I suddenly realized that I was looking round for some sign of a disturbance of the ground where a mine might have been planted, for some withering grass which might have been disturbed.

"Operation Dragoon", defined by one war correspondent at the beach-head as one of the worst kept secrets of the war. The correspondents knew this before they sailed. Some of them, on being warned to stand by, went to bookshops in Rome to try to buy copies of *Baedeker* for southern France.

Being security-minded, as all good war correspondents were, they would roam casually into the bookshop, buy a couple of innocuous books which they did not want, but were purchasing only as camouflage for their real purpose. Then they would walk towards the door. But on the threshold they would pause as on an afterthought.

"Oh, by the way, have you any copies of *Baedecker*?" they would ask with innocent guile. Several of them were rocked to the foundations by the answer they got.

"A few, signor, but I'm afraid we are sold out of *Baedecker* for the south of France, which perhaps is what you want."

I learned a lot about explosives from one man in Naples. He was "Tommy" Thomas, an explosives expert dressed up in the uniform of a sub-lieutenant R.N.V.R. Special Branch while he was working in an operational area. His particular and immediate charge at that time was the great explosive depot in caves running into the hillside overlooking the Bay of Naples. In those caves and under his care were enough shells and explosive to blow Naples clean off the map.

Man and boy, "Tommy" had worked his way up through various grades in naval ordnance establishments. What he did not know about explosives and shells and mines was hardly worth knowing. He could unbutton any infernal machine, take samples of the various metals and explosives it contained, analyse them, and give a full report on the composition, mechanism and effects.

You would not pay much attention to this quiet, smiling, grey-haired little man if you passed him in the street, unless you were attracted by those tiny wrinkles at the corners of the eyes which bespoke the sense of humour and the ready laugh. Yet "Tommy" had lived next door to death all his life, and took it as a matter of course.

I particularly liked his story about the "blockbuster" he invented for the R.A.F. in the early days before the real blockbuster came along. He took two naval torpedoes, emptied them and had them welded together. Then he personally filled them with the most powerful explosive mixture available, fixed detonators in the war-head, and sent them off to the bomber boys. The first "blockbuster" was towed through the streets suitably shrouded.

The R.A.F. took it off and dropped it on the Germans.

"When they came back," he said, "they could hardly stop laughing long enough to tell me about it."

"Tommy" also told me about "blue crystals", the quintessence of high explosive. It appears that when T.N.T. in mines or depth-charges is stored under certain conditions of weather or moisture, it sometimes crystallized out in "blue crystals" which appear like a gleaming blue honeycomb on the outside of the container. This blue honeycomb represents sudden death in a very violent and swift form. It takes a steady nerve to cope with this menace. The honeycomb must be gently annointed with water, using a soft camel's hair brush, until the "blue crystals" are thoroughly soaked. Then the honeycomb must be lifted gently and immersed in water, to be dumped in deep water. The touch of a finger is sufficient to detonate these "blue crystals" until they are soaked with water.

The city of Algiers had a very narrow escape from destruction by these "blue crystals".

On the waterfront was a large dump of depth-charges. The officer in charge of them was showing the dump to an explosives expert one evening. They were stepping from one of the big canisters to another. There was a good moon high in the sky, and that saved the situation.

Just as the naval officer in charge of the dump was about to step forward to another depth-charge, the explosives expert saw a bluish sheen on the surface of the charge. It was gleaming in the strong moonlight. "Blue crystals". The naval officer was about to step on them. To his intense astonishment and indignation he received a terrific clout from the expert, which sent him sprawling backwards.

But he was soon thanking the expert for saving his life. Had that officer's foot gone down on the "blue crystals" they would have been detonated. The whole dump would probably have followed suit, and the naval officer and expert would have just disappeared into space. And a large part of Algiers would have been wrecked.

And so home again. Liverpool—London—Uxbridge.

## CHAPTER XV

### OPERATION NEPTUNE

BACK in England, and parked in hospital, I was lucky enough to meet there an officer who had had an important part in the biggest, brightest and best landing-craft job of all—Operation Neptune. The invasion of Normandy.

This officer, Commander L. R. Curtis, R.N.V.R., commanded the convoy of L.C.I.(S) which carried Lord Lovat's Commando Brigade to the assault at Ouistreham, and he had a very good overall picture of this greatest of all invasions. He went to considerable trouble to give me the full picture, and I found that landing craft had been progressing quite a lot since I had been in the Mediterranean. There were types of craft I had never even heard of—let alone seen. Apparently the landing-craft boys, with their complete versatility, had branched out into new lines of business, including fire-fighting. They had even taken into their ranks straightforward barges—so that Lord Louis's original crack about "commissioned bargees" had become a precise fact. Strangest of these was the L.B.K.—Landing Barge—Kitchen—which provided hot meals for the men of the minor landing craft who had no facilities for making meals.

To get the full picture of this gigantic operation, I must first give the overall facts for the Normandy landings. Here they are:

1. More than 5,000 ships and craft were used in the actual assault, and were swept in by more than 200 minesweepers.
2. More than 2,000 Allied merchant ships of a total gross tonnage of more than 4,000,000 were used in the build up of troops and supplies.
3. More than 125,000 Allied naval officers and men were engaged ashore and afloat on D-day, and nearly 70,000 Allied Merchant Service officers and men took part in the operation.
4. The landings were covered by 800 naval guns ranging from the 16-inchers of battleships to the 4-inchers of L.C.G.s. The naval units of the eastern task force alone fired 58,621 rounds in support of the Army between D-day and the fall of Le Havre.
5. In just less than one month from the initial assault 552 mines were accounted for off the beaches.
6. The stores alone handled during June amounted to more than a third of the normal import capacity of the United Kingdom.
7. In the British area alone 242 buoys and moorings, involving the handling of 3,265 tons of gear, were laid by the end of June.
8. More than 1,500,000 tons of equipment for the formation of the artificial harbour was towed across the Channel.

As the landing-craft boys and their little ships constitute the spear-head and essential part of an invasion, they had the lion's share of this vast enterprise. They started at the beginning, taking in the first assault waves, and they went on until the end, maintaining the ferry service between ship and shore and the shuttle service between Britain and the Continent. They had a rough time from both the weather and the enemy, but they did not miss a beat.

Some idea of the work performed by these craft can be gained from the list of types of landing craft taking part:

- L.C.T. (Landing Craft, Tank).—Marks 3, 4, 5 and 6.
- L.C.G.(L) (Landing Craft, Gun, Large).
- L.C.F. (Landing Craft, Flak).
- L.C.I.(L), with a capacity for about 240 troops.
- L.C.I.(S), a smaller variety, but looking nothing like "big brother". These were similar to a B class M.L. fitted with armour plating and converted to carry troops. These craft, with a capacity for about 100 troops, carried Commando troops almost exclusively.
- L.C.S.(L) (Landing Craft, Support (Large)), similar to the smaller L.C.I. but mounting a six-pounder gun forward and mortar, twin .5 machine-guns and Oerlikons. "They put up a very brave show inshore, attacking German pillboxes and strongpoints," said Commander Curtis.
- L.C.M.—Landing Craft, Mechanical.
- L.C.V.(P).—Landing Craft, Vehicle (Personnel).
- L.C.P.(L).—Landing Craft, Personnel (Large).
- L.C.A.—Landing Craft, Assault.
- L.C.T. (Rocket), with their banks of devastating rockets.
- L.C.A.(HR) (Landing Craft, Hedgerow), being landing craft fitted

with a novel type of bomb-thrower similar to those which had been used for throwing a blanket of bomb-like depth-charges against U-boats and originally titled "hedgehog".

L.C.A. (O.C.) (Landing Craft Obstruction Clearance), special craft equipped for parties engaged in clearing obstructions planted in shallow water to prevent landings.

L.C.H.—L.C.I. (L) fitted as control craft with special wireless gear.

L.C.E.—Landing craft fitted for carrying out emergency repairs to damaged minor landing craft.

L.C.N.—Landing craft fitted for navigational guide duties.

And finally came the barges:

L.B.V. (Landing Barge, Vehicle), for carrying Army fighting vehicles.

L.B.F. (Landing Barge, Flak), for fighting air attacks.

L.B.K. (Landing Barge, Kitchen), to feed the men of the minor landing craft.

Of course the ever useful "Ducks" (DUKWS) distinguished themselves in this show, and should be classed with the landing craft. Also the "RHINO" ferries, those queer sectional pontoons, like a bunch of oil drums strung together to ferry Army transport ashore, driven by a monstrous outboard motor which can be lowered or raised—a sort of overgrown "Evinrude".

Not to be forgotten were the Diesel-engined L.C.M.s which were fitted with trailer pumps and foam equipment for fighting fires in any craft close inshore and under the fiercest enemy fire.

This was the enormous sea-borne fleet of landing craft, and the shore organization behind it accounted for thousands more men. As soon as a good foothold was obtained on the Normandy shore, bases had to be established on the beach-head, manned by engineers, shipwrights and other specialists.

For Operation Neptune, the landing-craft fleet formed a Navy in itself. I am tempted to say THE Navy.

And right from the outset it was no easy job, for the weather was far from kind to these little ships. Yet, although the margins of time in the plan were necessarily small and the weather upset the timing of some craft, all assault groups touched down on the beach within fifteen minutes of planned times. To anyone who knows the complexities and difficulties of any amphibious operation, let alone the greatest amphibious operation in history, this constitutes a terrific tribute to the lads of the landing craft, nearly every one of whom was an amateur sailor, mostly youngsters whose knowledge of the sea had been confined to a day trip to the beach before the war. And what goes for the assault craft personnel was equally true of the many others performing a variety of duties, from planners and organizers to beach masters and port parties.

By D plus 9 half a million men and 77,000 vehicles had been landed in Normandy, largely due to the efforts of the L.S.T. and landing craft, and by D plus 28 one million men had been landed. By June 30 the grand total of arrivals in France was:

570 Liberty Ships.



180 Personnel Ships.

788 Coasters.

905 Landing Ship, Tank.

1,442 Landing Craft, Tank.

372 Landing Craft, Infantry (Large).

These carried 850,000 troops, 485,000 tons of stores and 155,000 vehicles.

The figure for tank landing craft—1,442—suggests the story which Commander Curtis emphasized when he described Operation Neptune from his point of view.

"The L.C.T. in the Cross-Channel Shuttle Service surprised everybody with their very great performance," he said. "It had been expected that when the bad weather really set in, the tank landing craft would have to be withdrawn. Nobody thought they could stand up to the Channel in its really nasty moods.

"Yet they maintained their Channel shuttle service from D-day until the end of July, 1945. That must be a unique record.

"Tank landing craft were never expected to weather cross-Channel conditions in all their vicissitudes of wind, sea and tide. And, as one high-powered official comment put it: 'That they carried on is a tribute to the devotion to duty and seamanship of the R.N.R. and R.N.V.R. officers who mostly manned them.'"

Having had a fair amount to do with tank landing craft myself, I do know that I would not like to command one of them in such conditions. The men who handled them in the tough winter weather conditions often took their lives in their hands in a far more cold-blooded way than making a run in to a beach under enemy fire.

At the beginning the barge units also took it on the chin, but still did a splendid job. Many were lost or damaged in the gale which made the mere crossing a hazardous bit of work, but the rest of these barges carried on to get oil, petrol, water and repair units to Normandy.

Commander Curtis also had high praise for the L.C.P. (L), those armoured motor-launches, which were used extensively for smoke-laying. This was sheer hard slogging, with great discomfort, in very dangerous conditions. It was a test of sheer endurance for the officers and ratings of these little ships, and they carried on day after day without a moan. The crowning touch to the discomfort of these craft is the smoke-making apparatus, the great drums of smoke-producing acid aft generating acrid fumes which sear the eyes, throat and nose, and at the same time throw off a lot of heat right above the tanks in which is kept the high-octane petrol for the engines.

As for the more offensive landing craft—and please do not misunderstand my use of the word "offensive"—the L.C.G.s, L.C.F.s and L.C.T. (Rocket) played an important part in "drenching" the landing beaches just before the assault went in.

The L.C.G.s then did much in the defence of our exposed eastern flank fronting Le Havre. The Germans used E-boats, one-man submarines and special boats filled with explosives, as well as an unpleasant

collection of mines to try to smash our invading fleet, and the L.C.G.s gave battle to these attackers.

They were led by Commander K. A. Sellars, D.S.O., D.S.C., who was "Father" of the support squadron which did so well in Normandy, and was to win undying fame at Walcheren.

This eastern area was constantly subjected to shellfire, and inevitably there were casualties, but the great work went on without pause or hesitation. Out on this flank destroyers, M.T.B.s and M.G.B.s were used continuously on the patrol lines, and some of the smaller L.C.I.s even joined in the wholesale dropping of explosive charges to maintain a barrage against the Germans' "human torpedoes", those strange man-ridden devices which I had first seen on Anzio beach-head.

To diverge—it was on this eastern flank that Lord Lovat's Commando Brigade did such a magnificent job in cleaning out a key French village, and fighting through to the Orne Canal bridge to link up with troops of the British 6th Airborne Division and so secure the eastern flank of the whole bridge-head.

But it was not only in the spectacular work that the landing craft distinguished themselves. The smaller L.C.I.s, for instance, after doing their initial tough job, were left in the assault area for weeks up till D plus 90 to act as control and dispatch craft and for ferrying troops. One flotilla alone, the 200th, had covered more than 30,000 miles in the assault area up to D plus 90, and the spirit of enthusiasm in these craft, despite the hard slog, was illustrated by one craft L.C.I.(S)506 which, designed to carry 100 troops, embarked 330 troops with their equipment.

Most minor landing craft, except the L.C.A., which returned to their davits in the parent vessels, the Landing Ships—Infantry, were also used in ferry control and build-up duties. They remained off the assault beaches for three months in all weathers.

I asked Commander Curtis for further impressions, and he paid a tribute to the "DUKWS".

"They were worth their weight in gold," he said. "They kept going just all the time throughout the assault area. Even when the great gale was smashing and battering the great Mulberry Port those 'Ducks' kept running inside its comparative shelter. They put up a magnificent show."

So the "Ducks" won their spurs. Out in the Mediterranean we had been inclined to look upon them as a sort of subsidiary Navy operated by "pongoes". Of course they had impressed us at Anzio, but still they were a "pongo Navy". Now they had really won their naval "spurs", and taken a rightful place with their landing craft bigger brothers.

Curtis also paid his little tribute to those glamourless craft, the Landing Barge, Kitchen.

"They were a godsend in the assault area in feeding minor craft people," he said, and went on to add the sincere thanks of himself and his lads to the cruisers *Frobisher* and *Hawkins*.

"After completing their bombardment duties," he explained, "they

adopted us in a big way. They were parent ships to minor and major landing craft in every sense of the word.

"The *Frobisher* particularly will be long remembered by us. She always gave a warm welcome to officers and ratings from all landing craft.

"She offered every assistance in her power. She took our craft alongside and supplied stores. She made all landing-craft officers honorary members of the wardroom Mess.

"Without this sort of help the landing craft would never have been able to carry on as they did in all the bad weather encountered. Life on board a minor landing craft for weeks on end under rough weather conditions and on *compo rations* was not exactly a soft existence."

That is the rough outline, inadequate I admit, but like a suet pudding with some plums in it. Frankly, I'm not keen on figures and statistics. I prefer the human angle. I asked Curtis about this. I could hardly expect him to boast of his part in the show. He was not that type. All he was keen to do was to get his landing-craft boys well into the front of the picture. They deserved it.

"Give me a typical case," I asked.

He rummaged in a folio where he kept some treasured souvenirs of the greatest amphibious operation. Yes, there it was. One man's view of the assault. It was a report he received from one of his officers, a New Zealand lieutenant. With it was a booklet published by the same officer which gave a humorous but revealing personal slant on D-day.

The official report was a pretty bit of work. "One man's invasion" is the title I would give it. It was by Lieutenant Denis J. M. Glover, D.S.C., R.N.Z.N.V.R., of the Caxton Press, Christchurch, New Zealand, who was Commanding Officer of H.M. L.C.I.(S) 516.

This is his official view of D-day, with suitable sidelights. It begins with that beautiful naval formality: "I have the honour to submit the following report on the movements of H.M. Ship under my command on the morning of June 6, 1944."

Then Denis Glover got quickly into his natural stride:

There was not the slightest difficulty in recognizing the beach or the beach limits: and nice waltz time (with a merest tendency to jitterbugging) was maintained throughout the rows of impedimenta designed to discourage trespassers.

Beaching was carried out at 1200 revolutions to starboard of the flagship, whose ramps were already out when I touched down. 521 beached close on our starboard side. There did not appear to be enough mortar fire or shell fire to go around, for we received no hits; though it was observed that 529 was smoking aft and on the bridge (though on closer examination this proved to emanate from Lieutenant Davey's pipe). . . .

The 6th Commando personnel landed quickly in about eighteen inches of water, and I could see no casualties among them as they advanced up the beach. My ramp parties, under the direction of Sub-Lieutenant Fitzsimon, carried out their duties flawlessly.

I had to wait for 505 to clear before unbeaching, and it was then that fire was observed coming from a tall building on the port bow. The port guns were accordingly directed on this shore target at a range of 600 yards, and *hot porridge* was poured into all windows with great accuracy.

After unbeaching and clearing the underwater defences—the beer bottle variety of which struck me as letting the owners down—I directed my attention to what ships were seen to be in difficulties. 531 could be seen floating bows-up some distance to the east, and after flashing had yielded no result, it was concluded that she had been abandoned.

I could see two other of our craft still on the beach, but at this stage, 0900, we were hailed by L.C.I.(L) 130, who was badly holed on the port waterline and listing about 10 degrees. Putting alongside, we took aboard some 196 troops with their equipment, and three casualties. These troops were far from happy, and not over-anxious to leave their sinking ship for the security of dry land. However, my crew, whose behaviour under fire had from the first been exemplary, were experiencing the exhilaration of battle, and although shells and mortars continued to fall around us, their cheerfulness and active help did much to rally the troops and get them across what must have seemed rather horribly heaving decks.

At 0950 a landing was made (practically dry) on White beach which, by this time, was undergoing the confusion attendant on accurate and persistent mortar fire, which hit an L.C.I.(L) a dozen yards to starboard and was killing many troops on the beach. Due to unfamiliarity our troops were slow in getting ashore, and my crew had to take after them a good deal of equipment they would otherwise have left behind.

Our only damage from the enemy was a little shrapnel from near misses, one piece of which severed the lead to the navigational warning device.

The casualties, one of whom appeared critically wounded, were kept aboard. The Coxswain, Able-Seaman R. Workman, dressed their wounds and administered morphia. The behaviour of this rating deserves mention. He showed great activity allied to a cheerful coolness, and displayed a quick-witted appreciation of the organizational and seamanship problems confronting us. . . .

Coming off White beach I could see none of our ships on the beach to the eastward, with the exception of 531, aground near the water's edge. However, 517 was observed some way from the beach and very much down by the bows. We closed her with the intention of passing a line, but by this time she was in a sinking condition, with her screws out of the water (which was beginning to enter her hatches for'ard). Her position was approximately two and a half miles from Ouistreham canal entrance, and drifting towards an uncleared area. The time was 1010. It was interesting to note that she was not yet out of a rancorous and rather vindictive enemy fire.

It was obvious that 517 would shortly founder, so the officers and ratings were taken aboard 516. She was last seen with water over her decks, being fired on by one of our support craft.

H.M.S. *Serapis* was then signalled about our casualties, and agreed to take them aboard. This was done at 1040, and the signalman of 517, who was unconscious, was sent with them.

I continued to cruise off the beach in hope of being of some use to someone until 1110, when 518 and 532 were sighted together, the latter down by the bows. It was clear that both vessels were in trouble, and on asking if we could help I was instructed by F.O.201 to do my best for 532. When we put alongside she seemed fairly full of water for'ard, and we began to arrange the transfer of our portable pump. But in the stiff breeze and heavy sea running, 516 received quite substantial damage to timbers and stringers due to pounding against the heavier ship; and it was decided with the Commanding Officer that as he had the use of his engines and was not in immediate danger of sinking we should cast off and leave him to seek more adequate assistance.

At 1215 we sighted and joined 519 and 503.

That was one man's front row view of an invasion, but Denis Glover's personal booklet, which runs to only about three thousand words in a dramatically whimsical vein, is more revealing. I only wish that I had a copy of it myself.

Yet I cannot resist quoting a small section concerning the actual

assault beaching for comparison with his official report. His own inner reflections and running commentary to self form the bulk of the text, with his orders and remarks to others underlined to stand them out from the running line of thought. This gets an interesting effect, best illustrated by a little section covering the run over.

My God, just these twelve small ships, and all these precious lives alone in mid-Channel. Query, are lives precious in wartime? Yes, until they can be thrown away for their planned objective. *Hello, Colonel, come up on the bridge. I wonder how he feels. How are we getting on? Oh, fine, sir. Right up to time. We'll hit the run-in position in approximately three hours twenty minutes. Either that or Le Havre harbour boom. . . . You see, sir, everything weighed off! Buoys laid to mark every channel—can't go wrong! No, the R.N.V.R. hasn't done badly in this war. Do you know, sir, there isn't a single R.N. officer with us. Navigation? That's no worry—it's your seasick troops I'm worried about.*

But it is in his description of the actual touch down on the beach that I found the most piquant comparison between Lieutenant Glover's official report and his running commentary to himself.

Now eyes for everything, eyes for nothing. The beach looms close, maybe a mile. There are people running up and down it. There are fires, and the bursting of shells. Yes, and wrecked landing craft everywhere, a flurry of propellers in the savage surf among those wicked obstructions. Beach clearance parties I expect, bloody heroes every one. Special craft stooging quietly in, some of them on fire, though. Diesel fuel burns black. That vicious destroyer to port is irritating me, but the Colonel doesn't seem to mind. He's cool, but I'll bet he's worried. Curious how all these soldiers dislike an assault by water. I'd hate to dash out of foxholes at machine-guns. Damn him, I can pretend I'm cool too. *It's the noisiest gun—Starboard ten!—it's the noisiest gun in the Navy that four point seven.—Midships, Cox'n! What a cool disinterested reply he makes. Colonel, you make me grin. I like your nerve.*

We are on those bristling stakes. They stretch before us in rows. The mines on them look as big as planets. And those graze nose shells pointing towards us on some of them look like beer bottles. Oh God, I would be blown up on a mine like a beer bottle. Whang, here it comes—those whizzing ones will be mortars—and the stuff is falling all round us. Can't avoid them, but the mines and collisions I can avoid. Speed, more speed. Put them off by speed, weave in and out of those bloody spikes, avoid the mines, avoid our friends, avoid the wrecked craft and vehicles in the rising water, and GET THOSE TROOPS ASHORE. . . .

Everything is working as we've exercised it for so long. Oh hell, this new tin hat is far too big for me—I'll shake it off my head out of fright, if I'm not careful. . . .

So he goes on until he is about to touch down. I like his references to mortars—or rather, I don't like them. If there is one thing I detest it is mortar fire, and when mortars fire white phosphorus bombs I am positively paralysed with terror. But to come to the touch down, Denis Glover goes on:

*Slow ahead together. Slow down to steady the ship, point her as you want her, then half ahead together and on to the beach with a gathering rush. Put her ashore and be damned! She's touched down. One more good shove ahead to wedge her firm. Smooth work, Fitz, oh, smooth as clockwork. Now off you go! Good luck, Commandos, go like hell! Next meeting—Brighton! How efficiently, how quickly they run down the accustomed ramps, not a man hit that I can see, and there they go slashing through a hundred yards of water, up over more of the flat beach than that, and out of sight*

among the deadly dunes. The Colonel turns to wave, and is gone with them. They ignore the beach fire. They have their objective and they are going for it, the best troops we can produce. God go with them.

Well, there you have it. One man's view of an invasion—through official and unofficial eyes.

Although I never met Denis Glover, I felt he was an old friend after reading his little book—and I was delighted to learn that for his work off the Normandy beaches he was awarded a Distinguished Service Cross as an immediate award for gallantry. The recommendation said:

During the landing of No. 6 Commando by L.C.I.(S) at Ouistreham at H plus 75 minutes on 6th June, 1944, this officer behaved with exemplary courage and displayed the utmost determination to see that as many troops as possible were got ashore despite enemy mortar and shellfire.

After landing Lieutenant-Colonel Mills Roberts, D.S.O., M.C., and his party, and extricating his craft from some rather unpleasant-looking obstructions, Lieutenant Glover observed a fully laden L.C.I.(L), No. 130, holed forward by shellfire with a list to port and sinking. Without hesitation he took his craft alongside and embarked nearly two hundred troops in a craft designed to carry one hundred. He then pressed on into the beach and landed them successfully. By this time enemy fire was growing hotter and L.C.I.(S) and the military suffered casualties.

Unbeaching again, he discovered a brother officer in difficulties with his craft practically awash to the bridge. L.C.I.(S)516 was taken alongside, and the officers and crew of L.C.I.(S)517 were taken off successfully a few minutes before the craft sank. During the whole of this time the area was under constant enemy fire.

Subsequently, in Area "Gold", Lieutenant Glover has worked indefatigably and cheerfully despite damaged rudders, difficult steering and battered propellers.

Another richly earned Distinguished Service Cross went to Lieutenant F. J. Backlog, R.N.V.R., Commanding Officer of L.C.I.(S)506. This young officer had the true seaman's spirit, for he saved his ship when an expert had said that it was as good as lost. He went in at Ouistreham also, a hot corner, and his craft was seriously damaged below the water-line by the enemy obstructions.

Yet, with his little ship seemingly sinking under him, he went to the rescue of L.C.I.(S)531. He carried out the rescue of the officers and crew from the other L.C.I. under heavy enemy fire, and then he went alongside the sloop H.M.S. *Stork* to seek assistance.

The Warrant Shipwright in the *Stork* took a gloomy view of the waterlogged craft.

"Can't do anything now," he said. "Probably have to sink her in the end."

This was not good enough for Lieutenant Backlog. He loved that little ship which he commanded. Any good sailor loves his ship. It is something more than an intricate mass of metal to him. It lives. It has a being in itself. So much more does a good Commanding Officer cherish his command. Anybody who spoke to Backlog about sinking his ship was talking murder. He had taken that ship into the beach and brought it off again, and he meant to keep it afloat. By this time there was three feet of water for'ard.

Lieutenant Backlog would not accept the official verdict.

So he set to work on his own initiative. Working hard with his crew he managed to plug the holes in the hull to such good effect that, by the end of the day, he arrived under his own power at the rendezvous with his Flotilla Officer in "Gold" Area and reported for duty. His craft was sill obviously down by the bows, but the water was now under control.

Lieutenant Backlog had lost no time in getting to Area "Gold"—"in order to get on with the job," as he himself put it.

And the little ship was saved. It was later returned to England to undergo repairs, and returned to Normandy to carry on non-stop for 70 more days.

Another young officer who showed great courage and determination in a very hot corner was Sub-Lieutenant Douglas Ivor Jones, R.N.V.R., who was in command of the L.C.T.8854.

His craft was hit by mortar fire which started a blaze among the Army vehicles at the after end of the hold. Soon ammunition in that section of the hold was exploding, but Douglas Jones and his men fought the fire with great courage. And, in the midst of all this trouble, there came an appeal for help from another craft which had got stranded on the beach.

With some of his men still fighting the fire, Sub-Lieutenant Jones took his little ship to the rescue, and towed the other craft off the beach and to safety.

All this time he had asked for no help for himself, and in the end he got the fire on board his craft under control. He returned to his base with only three vehicles destroyed by the blaze.

A skilful job of rescue gained Lieutenant Reginald Smith, R.N.V.R., Commanding Officer of L.C.I.(S)508, a mention in despatches.

When he saw another L.C.I., commanded by Lieut. J. Seymour, R.A.N.V.R., lying broached to on the beach amid dangerous obstructions, having been hit in the engine-room by shellfire with four petrol tanks holed by armour-piercing shell, he did not hesitate to go in to save it.

Picking his way among the first wave of small L.C.I.s, which were coming out again after landing their troops, he managed to pass a tow line to the damaged craft.

All this time the beach was being swept by enemy gunfire, and Lieutenant Smith and his craft were among the main targets. But with great coolness he effected the rescue, showing, as the official recommendation stated, "great judgment in handling his craft in the midst of some quite unpleasant dangers to safe navigation"—not to mention the enemy fire.

There are also some fine stories told about some of the landing-craft ratings. I particularly like the brand of courage shown by a trio of heroes, Wireman Arthur Martindale, of L.C.I.(S)505, Able-Seaman George Wells, of L.C.T.898, and Sick-Berth Attendant Emlyn Jones, of L.C.I.(L)111.

When L.C.I.(S)505 went in to the beach in the face of fierce enemy fire, she was swept by a hail of lead and several men became casualties.

But she put her troops ashore all right, and then began to pull out. Then it was discovered that the scrambling nets which had been lowered over the side to help the troops disembark had fouled a beach obstruction and were preventing the ship getting clear.

The First Lieutenant sent Martindale to cut away the nets. Although he was wounded in the face, the Wireman did not mention it. He jumped to his feet without hesitation, climbed over the side and cut away the nets to free his craft.

Nor did this finish the matter. Later Martindale was discovered supervising the dressing of the wounds of Commando casualties, soldiers who had been knocked out before they could get ashore. And all this time he had not thought of himself, making no attempt to have his own wounds treated. I think that Wireman Martindale richly earned the Distinguished Service Medal he was awarded for his courage.

As to Able-Seaman George Wells, he also showed great courage after being wounded. When his L.C.T. beached a shell exploded in the port winch-house where Wells was with other ratings. Three were wounded, including Wells himself. Soon afterwards another direct hit killed and wounded other members of his party. This time Wells was severely wounded. For the rest of the story I can do no better than quote his "individual courage report" in all its simplicity:

Although dreadfully injured, Wells remained cheerful and concerned only for his messmates. One of his fingers was amputated with a pair of scissors, but Wells found courage to joke about this also.

Yes, I definitely admire the brand of courage displayed by Able-Seaman Wells.

Sick Berth Attendant Jones also displayed a cool, steady brand of bravery in his large L.C.I. His craft was hit below the water-line and seven seriously wounded men down in one of the troop spaces were in danger of drowning. Emlyn Jones went to the rescue, and did a great job in attending to these and other severely injured men in the flooded section.

That is cool, calculating courage. It took nerve even to go below into that shambles. And his report adds:

He showed great courage and amputated the legs of three casualties before they were finally transferred to H.M.S. *Serapis*.

Those were just a few of hundreds of examples of gallantry given on D-day of Operation Neptune by the lads of the landing craft. Yet, in the midst of the hurly-burly, they still had time to pay tribute to an American comrade who was awarded the British Distinguished Service Cross for his gallant work that day.

This American was Lieutenant G. C. Clark, of the United States Coastguard Service. He was in command of the United States Naval Coastguard Cutter No. 35. His ship was detailed to act as escort to the smaller L.C.I.s landing Commandos at Ouistreham.



After landing her troops and drawing clear from the beach L.C.I.(S)524 suffered a direct hit from an enemy shell, and blew up in a sheet of flame. She left a mass of blazing petrol on the water.

Yet, although his own cutter used high-octane petrol, Lieutenant Clark did not hesitate to steer straight into the flames to rescue the Commanding Officer and some ratings of the lost L.C.I. He certainly took his life in his hands for his British comrades.

In reporting upon this incident the Flotilla Officer of the British L.C.I.s said:

Lieutenant Clark had previously assured us that, if need be, he would beach with L.C.I.(S) if by doing so he could help. It is considered that he lived up to his words in the finest way.

It is submitted that favourable consideration may be given to recognizing this officer's very gallant act by some suitable British award.

It was.

That is just a glimpse of the little bit of hades experienced triumphantly by the landing-craft types at the invasion of Normandy.

There perished that day in L.C.I.(S)524 a very gallant young officer, Sub-Lieutenant Frank Hastings Hardy, R.N.V.R. Quiet, unassuming, a steadying influence on his young crew in action, he had taken part in nearly all the Mediterranean landings and those at Madagascar. Normandy, the crowning epic of all the landings, was to be his last. His body was washed ashore near Le Havre on June 13, and buried near by. Let us salute Frank Hastings Hardy and the other grand youngsters who died with him.

Yet, though there were some tough spots in Normandy, Commander Curtis expressed the opinion that the job done by the landing craft at the assault on Westkapelle, in the Dutch island of Walcheren, a few months later, was even finer.

Here Commander Sellars' Support Squadron of L.C.F., L.C.G. and the smaller L.C.S.(L) wrote a very bright page in landing-craft history. They sacrificed themselves to let in the L.C.T. and L.C.I.(S) which landed the tanks and Commandos under the very noses of the German guns. Had the enemy switched his fire to the L.C.I.(S) and L.C.T., it is doubtful whether a soldier would have got ashore. But the Support Squadron, standing in to point-blank range and slugging it out with the German gunners, paid a heavy price. So, in keeping with landing-craft tradition—the troops were put ashore in accordance with orders.

## CHAPTER XVI

### ARAKAN ADVENTURES

THE landing-craft fleet reached its peak in Operation Neptune, but it was ready to go on to even greater heights in the Far East just when the Japanese packed up.

Shortly before Tokyo's surrender, Lord Louis Mountbatten visited London. I asked him at that time whether the landing-craft operations in his SEAC command would be on a comparable scale.

"Even more—" he said, "landing-craft operations in the drive for Singapore will be on a very large scale."

Already landing craft had taken a leading part in the Arakan campaign on the seaward flank of the Fourteenth Army, just as they had served the Eighth Army in the Mediterranean. And in this Arakan campaign Britain's sea-soldiers had distinguished themselves as landing-craft types. With such a great number of officers and ratings required for manning the enormous and growing fleet of landing craft in the West and East, the "Royals" had for some time been gradually integrated into the landing-craft organization.

For the Normandy invasion and the build-up they had had their first big-scale experience as sea-soldiers in the full sense of the word. They had fully manned a large proportion of the assault landing craft for the first onslaught, and also many minor landing craft for the build-up.

Now, in the Arakan campaign, they had six entirely Royal Marine flotillas working in close co-operation with craft of the Royal Indian Navy.

This was just another manifestation of the versatility of the "Royals", for whom I have always had the most profound admiration. In the long and glorious history of the Corps *per mare per terram* they have always lived up to their boast of "first on, last off". And the jobs they have done are legion. They have driven trains, ridden camels, built ports, served as artillerymen—and woe betide the Marines in any cruiser or battleship whose turret is not at least equal in every respect to the other turrets manned by seamen. They pride themselves on a higher rate of fire, and efficiency—but don't tell the seamen I said so.

If you want a tailor, a baker, a valet, a bridge-builder, a gunner, a Commando, a blacksmith or a man of many talents—ask the Royal Marines. Their family tradition is one great characteristic of the Corps. Both in the ranks and among the officers you will find a large proportion of members whose families have served the "Royals" for generation after generation—brothers, fathers, uncles, cousins, nephews.

Twice I was the guest of the Royal Marines at Portsmouth and Plymouth. In demonstrating this aspect of the Corps they introduced me to whole families of "Royals", and told me of many others.

For instance, there was one sergeant at Plymouth who took me to the library in the Sergeants' Mess and showed me an old book in which it was recorded that his great-grandfather had been "mulct of the sum of two shillings" for losing a pike overboard in Nelson's day.

There were so many cases of this kind that I could not help exclaiming "Good heavens, you don't recruit 'em; you breed 'em."

Even with the heavy "dilution" of the Corps necessitated by the war, the "Royals" have instilled their very great spirit into the newest recruits. Constantly they have held up the many brave incidents of

their history, not as something to look back on, but as a target to be aimed at and exceeded.

So, it is not surprising that in the very difficult conditions of the Arakan campaign, some distinctly raw recruits of the "Royals" acquitted themselves with high honour. For this job they had to draw on men who were far from completing their training for this new kind of warfare when there arose the necessity for executing it.

For this weird amphibious jungle warfare the "Royals" had twenty-two assault landing craft, sixteen medium support landing craft and two mechanized landing craft.

The first of the leapfrog landings was to be carried out at Akyab, to threaten the Jap lines of supply and retreat, while the Fourteenth Army drove down from the north.

The Marines, as is their custom, put in the assault waves, with those other "forgotten ships", the motor-launches, helping in the close support. Out at sea stood a bombardment force of bigger ships in support. Once the "Royals" had established the beach-head, reinforcements were soon flowing shorewards in tank landing craft and the large L.C.I.s.

Then began the weirdest and most nightmarish form of "naval" warfare yet on record. "Chaung" warfare began in grim earnest. A "chaung", I believe, may be best described as a jungle creek. For the first time landing craft, and M.L.s, penetrated deep inland along the network of jungle-lined waterways to seek out the enemy and attack him wherever he was found. In some places even destroyers could get a little way in, make fast to trees and bombard the Japs.

Minor landing craft were used by the Army to carry raiding parties inland, and the M.L.s went well in to give bombardment support.

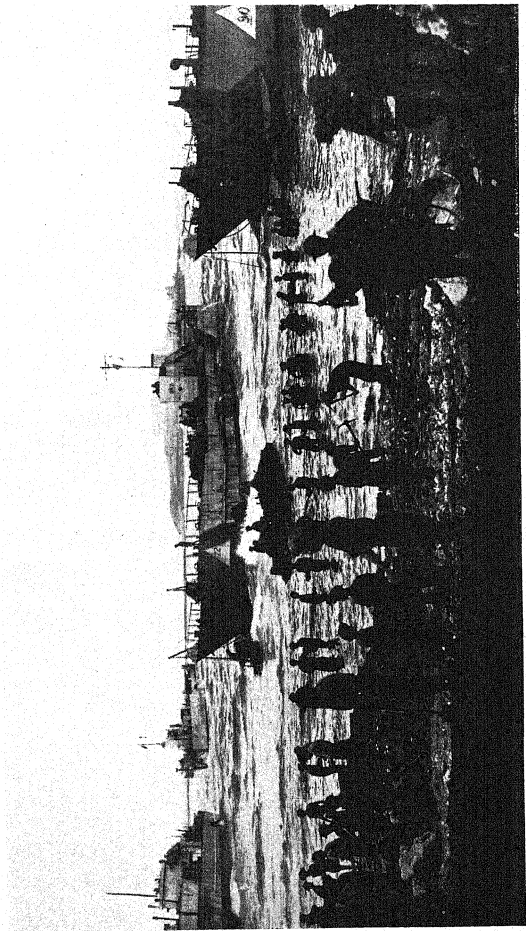
After the Akyab assault the minor landing craft were based in a creek beside some old rice mills. Conditions were primitive and very difficult. The Marines were short of food and all kinds of gear, and spare parts for the landing craft were unobtainable. But it is in such conditions that the Marines shine by virtue of their gift of improvisation, and they made shift to keep their craft running and their personnel fit.

The next great leap southwards along the Arakan coast took the "Royals" with their landing craft to Ramree and the outlying island of Cheduba.

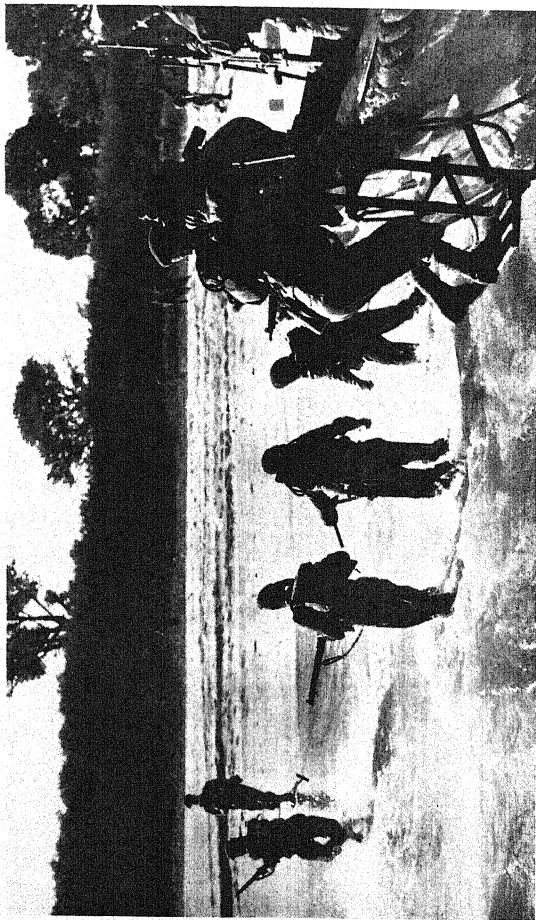
The Ramree assault was launched from two infantry landing ships, cross-Channel types of packetboats with the landing craft slung from large davits on each side. The assault craft were covered by support landing craft and minor war vessels.

Having established a strong position ashore, the "Royals" joined in the job of wiping out the fleeing Japs. The support landing craft and the mechanized landing craft worked with the M.L.s in cutting escape routes. Assault landing craft carried raiding parties to hunt down the scattered Japs, and finally the enemy garrison of Ramree were all killed or captured.

For the Cheduba operation the Marines of the Fleet were carried to the attack in cruisers, and landed in L.C.P. (M); those most primitive-



INVASION : Landing Craft (Tank) putting their cargoes ashore on a Sicilian beach.



AFTER THE JAP: Royal Marine Commandos land on a beach of the Arakan coast.

looking of landing craft. As these craft headed towards the beach, cruisers and destroyers gave covering fire, and aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm "spotted" for the warships, directing the fire on all enemy strong-points.

The Japs, who had no hope of reinforcements or supplies, put up a bit of a fight on the beaches, but the Royal Marines were soon masters of the assault area. Then they went right in, clearing the island, and not long afterwards they handed over the island to the Army as a present. Meanwhile M.L.s were repeating their Akyab performance by patrolling around the island to dispose of any of the little yellow men who tried to escape in boats.

Similar but smaller leapfrog landings on the same pattern were made farther down the coast, and at last came the great day for the recapture of Rangoon. Things were moving fast in the Burma campaign, and some units of the Fourteenth Army hoped to win the race for Rangoon by land from the north.

But Rangoon had a specific significance for the Royal Marines. In accordance with their tradition, the "Royals" had been the last to leave that ill-fated Burmese city, and they intended to be the first to return. This was expected to be a much greater operation than any of the Arakan jobs, though, as it turned out, it was a walk-over, the Japs having fled.

So nearly nine hundred Royal Marine officers and men were gathered for the landing craft used in the Rangoon amphibious operation, which was prepared as an assault, but proved to be a re-occupation. There were more than one hundred landing craft entirely manned by Marines, while among the major landing craft the "Royals" supplied the guns' crews for five L.C.G.s to give their comrades bombardment cover.

The plan was to land an Indian Division on both banks of the Rangoon River to clear the approaches to the city from the south. The "Royals" would spearhead the drive upstream to reach Rangoon first.

Night landings having become almost a thing of the past, thanks to experience in such operations as "Neptune" and "Dragoon", H hour was fixed as 7 a.m. on May 2.

Large convoys steamed southwards for the assault, well protected by ships of the Royal Navy and Royal Indian Navy, with good air cover provided by carrier forces of the East Indies Fleet.

The big problem was the run-in. The distance the assault craft had to cover between their parent ships and the chosen beaches was twenty-eight miles, the longest approach ever carried out by assault craft in an amphibious operation. L.C.I.(L) and L.C.T. were following in, with L.C.G.(L) giving close support.

Despite difficult weather conditions, which often seem to dog the landing-craft lads, the assault craft set off on their long run-in to time.

From a leading craft came the loud hail of the Navy's own hunting cry—"Follow father". The "Royals" were on their way back to Rangoon.

The men in the assault craft were thoroughly soaked during the

run-in. A nasty lop sent clouds of spray and salt water over them, as the little boxlike craft bumped and wallowed towards the distant beaches. It was a thoroughly uncomfortable ride, but the "Royals" can take it from either enemy or weather.

They reached the beaches in good order, and practically every assault craft touched down at approximately H-hour.

Then the assault landing craft returned to their parent infantry landing ships, except eight detailed for other duties. Only two craft had to be left on the beach, which was a triumph for the sea-soldiers in the matter of handling craft. For they had travelled twenty-eight miles each way, approaching the beaches in dark and foul weather. They had been continuously under way for over ten hours.

As it was then found that the Japs had vanished, the L.C.A.s subsequently went up river with the troops for twenty miles.

So, with no opposition to overcome, the "Royals" returned to Rangoon, landing the first troops there at 5 p.m. on May 3. And Rangoon was liberated after three years of Japanese occupation.

One officer who gained particular satisfaction from the Rangoon job was Captain T. I. Scott Bell, D.S.C., R.N. He led the way up the river to Rangoon. He had trained the L.C.I.(S) Squadron for the Normandy assault, and was well known to many of the landing-craft lads. An old submariner who had served on the China Station, he nursed a secret ambition to take an assault force to Hong Kong, but the Japanese capitulation robbed him of that pleasure.

For distances covered and difficulties overcome this was the climax to another triumph for landing craft—as well as for the Royal Marines.

No time was lost in getting Rangoon harbour back into working order as the focal point for one of the really great build-ups of the war, preparing for the great drive to Singapore. By the time the huge Pacific assault, capped by the atom bomb, knocked out the Japs, a goodly fleet of landing craft was assembling in southern Burma for the job in hand.

The great onslaught was due to get properly under way towards the end of September as the monsoon eased, and the general expectation among naval officers was Singapore by Christmas.

In the Rangoon operation one parent ship for the assault craft, an L.S.I., H.M.S. *Silvio*, put up a good show. She hit a mine during landing operations, but managed to stagger back to Trincomalee. Her propeller shaft was out of alignment and her bottom was buckled. All the while she was steaming those 1,200 miles to Trincomalee, hoses were being played on her bearings to stop them overheating.

Back at "Trinco", her engineering officer, Lieutenant-Commander James Brown, R.N.R., went down as a diver and inspected the damage. On his report it was decided that the *Silvio* could sail another 8,000 miles to Britain if her engines were carefully nursed. By steaming only in good weather she was brought safely to London docks.

The *Silvio* was a real Anglo-American. She was built in California in November, 1943, and, wearing the Red Ensign of the British Merchant Navy, she took part in the Normandy invasion. After this she was

commissioned as a British man-'o-war under the White Ensign and joined the East Indies Fleet at the end of 1944.

Before we leave Burma something should be told of the M.L.s which co-operated so closely with the landing craft in the "chaung" warfare.

There was the case of four M.L.s under the command of Lieutenant S. Mitchell who collected one of the biggest bags of Japanese prisoners up to that time. The Japs, although well armed with two trench mortars, three machine-guns and twelve rifles, surrendered twenty-one strong after an exciting chase.

They had been hiding in a village near Bassein. When they were surprised, they fled down the Pebin River in a sampan with the M.L.s in full cry. After a hunt lasting four hours, the M.L.s found the sampan abandoned.

Lieutenant Mitchell thought that the enemy might well be hiding in the surrounding jungle. He shouted through a loud-hailer, calling upon them to surrender or be shelled. He was answered by the silence of the jungle. Nothing happened.

So he ordered the four M.L.s to open fire. They had a lovely Guy Fawkes day, pouring 15,000 rounds into the surrounding woods. Still nothing happened.

Mitchell then split his force. Leaving two of his little ships on guard at this point, he sailed off with the other two to explore the Shandwe River which ran behind the wooded area where he suspected that the Japs were still hiding. But once more he drew blank.

He was just about to return to his rendezvous when a signal was received from the other two M.L.s. The supposedly suicidal, fanatical Japs had filed out of the jungle and surrendered to the Royal Navy. The officer in command of the Jap unit said that he and his men had really intended to fight, but the bombardment weakened their determination, and when they saw two of the British craft going round to take them in the rear, they decided to give up.

Two other M.L.s, commanded by South African officers, also had a field day and won Distinguished Service Crosses in a brisk little action off Myebon.

After the Army, pressing forward from Akyab, were closing in on the Japs around Myebon, these two M.L.s were given the task of preventing water-borne supplies from reaching the enemy.

They steamed up a small uncharted river, and lay in wait among the mangrove trees which grew in the swampy water.

After a long vigil they were excited to see four Japanese landing barges, full of supplies and heavily armed, coming unsuspectingly up the river. When these craft came abreast the M.L.s let drive. The fire of the two British boats split the jungle with a terrific roar, and they blew the Japanese barges right out of the water.

Later two more M.L.s, commanded by South African lieutenants, came up the river, and joined their triumphant comrades. The whole



force continued to lie in wait for new targets. They did not have very long wait. Soon they were delighted to see four Japanese motor gunboats coming down the river. Presumably the Japs were wondering what had happened to their supply barges, and had been attracted by the distant sound of gunfire.

The Japs were certainly on the alert. They seemed to have some idea of where the M.L.s were lying, for they opened fire blindly into the mangroves. That was the signal for a ding-dong battle. It was a swift and certain victory for the South Africans. The four Japanese motor gunboats soon joined their comrades at the bottom of the river.

The recommendation for the award of the D.S.C. for this spirited bit of action, spoke of the senior officer, Lieutenant-Commander A. G. Milne, S.A.N.F.(V), as showing "exceptional leadership and devotion to duty during the Akyab and Myebon assault, and the many coastal forces operations leading up to and immediately following these assaults. He led the first flight in to Myebon, and then effectively engaged enemy positions and guns at close range, giving valuable close support to the assaulting troops (and his landing-craft comrades) despite considerable enemy mortar and .75s fire."

The similar recommendation for his companion, Lieutenant R. L. J. Williams, said that Williams had commanded the first M.L. to penetrate the Mayu River, and brought back valuable information in addition to successfully engaging Japanese shore positions.

Milne was a veteran of "E-Boat Alley" of the East Anglian coast way back in the sticky days of 1941-42. What he had learned in some stirring, high-speed engagements off the English East Coast, he applied with excellent effect to the Japs off the Burmese west coast.

Now he found snipers added to his hazards, as he worked up the rivers in the "chaung" warfare.

"On one occasion," he said, "when we were out on patrol, all seemed quiet and serene. Then suddenly a bullet whistled 'out of the blue' and smashed through the forward window of the wheelhouse. It missed the quartermaster by inches.

"We immediately increased speed and brought all our guns to bear on the spot where I thought that the bullet had come from. I wasn't left long in doubt. A hail of bullets came at us. They punctured the hull, cut our exhaust pipe and slashed through the cushions in the wardroom.

"Some bullets made the First Lieutenant particularly mad. They carved through the suitcase in which he kept his Number Ones, and they certainly did not improve that uniform.

"Those 'snipers' turned out to be two machine-gun nests. We let them have it with everything we could bring to bear, and definitely knocked them out."

And while we are in these parts, we might pay tribute to another brand of "forgotten ship" with which landing craft occasionally co-operated.

This was a Hydrographic Survey ship with the East Indies Fleet. At the outbreak of war this luxury yacht was bought from America by the British Government, and converted for very special duties. When I say bought, I am being strictly accurate, but in fact she was a munificent gift from America. She changed hands for one dollar.

She, and other smaller ships which she mothered, played an important, but little known, part in the Burma campaign. Originally the yacht had been working with the submarine branch of the Navy. Now she was equipped not only with apparatus for survey work, but also with a printing plant to enable her to produce completed charts right on the spot. Assigned to operations with her were a number of small craft which were better suited to nosing into shallow creeks of the Arakan coast. They had to take plenty of risks, but they got their data, and after the capture of important areas such as Akyab, Ramree and Rangoon, up-to-the-minute charts were immediately available for the shipping which followed. One such chart was produced on board in only ten days from the completion of the actual survey. This represented an enormous amount of scientific and technical labour packed into a small space of time.

Tribute is certainly due to these "back-room boys of the front line".

That is a glimpse of one side of the squeeze which pushed Japan out of the war. The other side of the nutcrackers supplied by the Americans in the Pacific showed their terrific strength and skill in the field of landing craft to an even greater degree.

I think that the best way this can be shown is by telling a little about an American Flag Officer who seems to have escaped the limelight. I christened him the "Leapfrog Admiral" when an American colleague told me about him.

"Ever heard of Admiral Turner—Vice-Admiral A. K. Turner?" asked the young American naval lieutenant from the Pacific.

I hadn't. But apparently Admiral Turner is a tough American fighting Admiral who has really shaped the spectacular events in the Pacific which hit the headlines. Somehow or other the spotlight has never properly focused on the Admiral himself.

"He's a new kind of Admiral with a new kind of technique," said the American lieutenant, who should know. He had been serving on Turner's staff.

"He's really the man who turned the Jap tide in the Pacific by planning and directing the invasion of Guadalcanal, and he has organized and directed every other landing since then, right up to Okinawa. I suppose he'll finally put the boys ashore at Tokyo. Admiral Turner's the king of amphibious operations, the top-boss of landing craft. But he just doesn't bother about personal publicity."

"What's he like?"

"Well—he's a tall, thin and saturnine Californian, with beetling brows and a domed forehead. He's one of the most feared men in the United

States Navy—a real martinet with a rough tongue. But he's the man for the job, and he's been making naval history out there.'"

Yes, something new in naval history has certainly been written in the Pacific. As the young American explained it to me from his own experience, I saw it as a giant game of leapfrog, on an even greater scale than in the Mediterranean. For the Pacific war was the war of vast distances. Never before in history had full-scale warfare been waged over such a terrific space of ocean.

Compared with the Pacific, the Atlantic, main theatre of modern naval warfare, is a pond (though a mighty hectic pond of recent years). As to the Mediterranean, classical centre of naval warfare, that is a mere ditch beside the Pacific Ocean.

The difference between naval warfare in the Atlantic and in the Pacific was similar to the difference in land warfare between the Russian front of vast distances and swift movement and the Western Front, with its restricted lines of impact and hard sloggling.

The Battle of the Atlantic, with its lines running between the American eastern seaboard and the harbours of Britain or France, was fought over a distance of some two thousand miles. But two thousand miles was only the beginning in the Pacific, the distance from California to Pearl Harbour.

Then came another two thousand miles of open ocean to Guam or the Mariana Islands, and only then did you arrive within smelling distance of the Pacific war during the victorious stage. The Philippines, natural base for operations against Japan proper, lay another thousand miles farther, and even there you were still 1,700 miles from Tokyo. Guam, too small to be a full-scale invasion base, was 1,400 miles from Japan proper.

So just try to imagine a giant's game of hide and seek over those vast blind spaces of the Pacific Ocean. Even in these days of swift, far-ranging aircraft, supplemented by the all-seeing eye of Radar, the open ocean is very much a blind space in which a battleship, and even a fleet, is like the proverbial needle in the haystack.

Contemplating this vast problem, the United States Navy had long since concentrated upon the aircraft carrier and the amphibious operation involving the large-scale use of landing craft as answers to the strategic problem. But then, the American Navy, to its own immense chagrin, was caught with its pants down at Pearl Harbour, and its long-laid plans were temporarily knocked cock-eyed. For eighteen months the Japs spread westwards over the Pacific, while the American Navy fought defensively to gain time.

At this time there was a man in the Navy Department at Washington engaged on war planning duties who was racking his brains to find the answer to the great Jap menace. At last he had completed his blueprint for the first offensive. He discussed his scheme for a campaign in the Solomons with Admiral Ernest J. King, the head of the United States Navy, and President Roosevelt. They were convinced of his ability to execute the plan, and gave him the responsibility of carrying it out.

This was Vice-Admiral (then Rear-Admiral) Richmond K. Turner, popularly known—though not to his face—as “Kelly” Turner, a good fighting name. His was the task of turning the Japanese tide, and he chose such a tough task for a beginning that General MacArthur, himself no mean fighting man, had his doubts. The General could not at this time spare troops for the invasion of Guadalcanal, but Admiral Turner would not be deterred. He found his tough fighters for a tough job from the ranks of the American Marines.

So, on August 7, 1942, Admiral Turner launched his attack on Guadalcanal. For a while the success of the operation hung in the balance, but in the end the American Marines triumphed. August 7, 1942, had become an historic and significant date. The tide was on the turn. The Americans had taken a hand in the game of giants’ leapfrog which, for the preceding eighteen months, had seemed to be a game confined to Japs. Now Admiral Turner had showed the Americans the start of the long road back which led to Okinawa and Tokyo.

From that point Admiral Turner never looked back. Assault followed assault across the vast Pacific. The invasion of New Georgia, the Gilberts, the Marshalls, the Marianas, the Philippines and on to bloody Iwojima and bloodier Okinawa. All the work of “Kelly” Turner, and stemming from his Guadalcanal blueprint.

I dare say “Kelly” Turner, while rejoicing in the saving of life by the surrender of the Japanese, has a slight twinge of disappointment at not being able to put his blueprint for Tokyo into effect. He it was who would have directed the final assault on the Japanese homeland. For, as Director of Amphibious Forces, Pacific, Admiral Turner was the boss of all such operations, boss of sea, land and air forces in the assault, until such time as the Army gave notice that it was firmly established ashore.

“Kelly” Turner, said one of his staff officers, never seemed to have any doubts about his own blueprint. If he did, he hid any anxiety very well. On the eve of the crucial assault on Guadalcanal he had an omen. His flagship, the U.S.S. *McCawley*, the first attack transport which has since been sunk, was blacked out at sea off the Solomons. “Kelly” Turner groped his way into the darkness of the ship’s library, and took from the shelves the first book he laid hands upon. When he returned to his lighted cabin he found that the volume he had picked in the darkness, to while away the few hours before his plan was put to its test, was entitled “Victory”. That settled it.

“Kelly” Turner may be famous as a tough martinet, but to those who knew him he had a secretly tender heart. This was well illustrated by his great dictum, “I hate to see soldiers swim.” As boss of amphibious operations one of his great aims was to put troops ashore as dryshod as was humanly possible.

After the young American lieutenant had told me all about Admiral Turner, he went to a lot of trouble to show me a series of films which illustrated Turner blueprints in action. The public has seen some of these magnificent American naval action films, such as *The Fighting Lady*

and the assault on Iwojima, but there were others he showed me which were not circulated in Britain.

These truly magnificent films by the United States Navy gave a close-up of some of the fiercest fighting of the war. And always, wherever things were hottest, there were the landing craft in the foreground.

And that is just what I have been driving at all the time. British or American, the landing-craft boys are always there, wherever the fighting is the toughest, the slogging the hardest, the life roughest and most tedious. That is where you find the landing-craft lads I am very proud to call my friends.

After the last war there was a fashion as between nations, generally among those who had had the lesser share of the fighting, to claim that this or that country, this or that service, had "won the war".

If any half-wit starts that sort of crazy argument this time, and I am dragged into such a stupid discussion, I can give only one suggestion. As far as I can see the youngsters of the landing craft, the "commissioned bargees", did as much as any other body of men in this world to "win the war". And they did not make a song and dance about it.

That goes for both British and Americans, and all the Allied forces.

### POSTSCRIPT

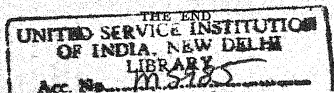
As I was finishing this book, I was delighted to see a Reuter dispatch recording that they had unveiled a marble plaque to me at Ste. Maxime. Well, not precisely to me—but to the Fighting Forty-Fifth, the "Thunderbirds", with whom I had the honour to land in the southern Invasion.

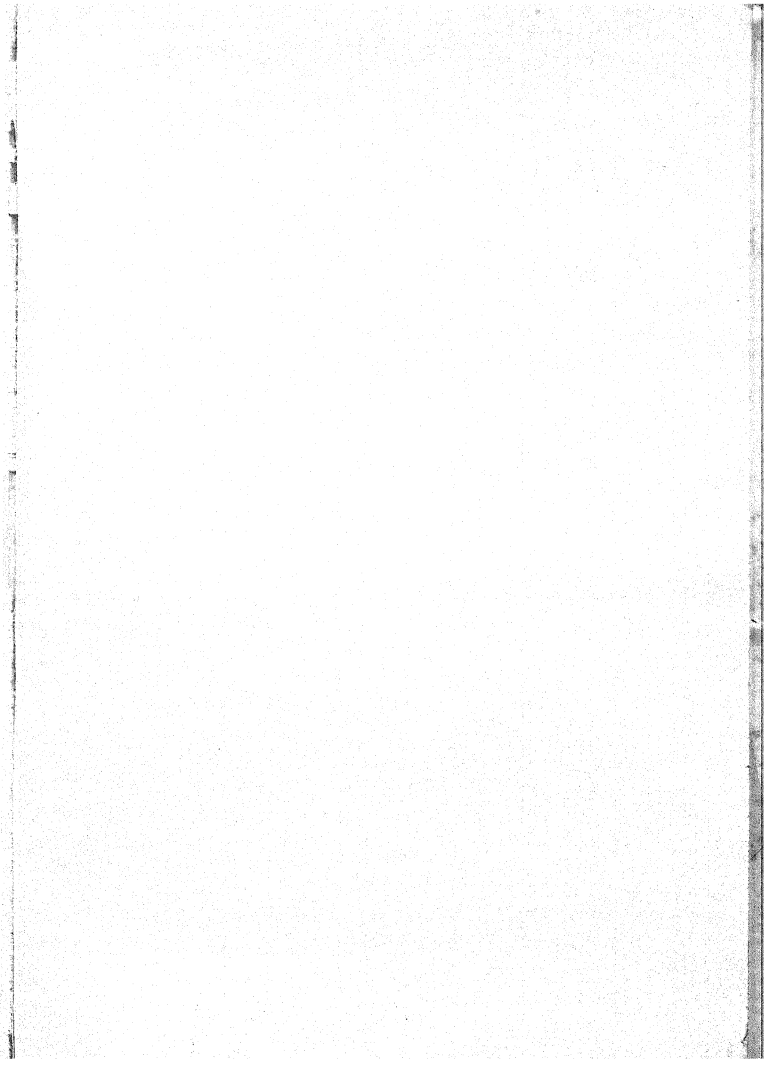
Here is Reuters report as a postscript to and happy memory of a great occasion:

Paris, Wednesday (August 15): Moving ceremonies commemorating the Allied landings in the South of France exactly a year ago [Good Lord, it doesn't seem that long!] took place at various points on the Riviera coast today. . . .

The whole population of the small town of Sainte Maxime nearby went to the beach where a marble plaque was unveiled to commemorate the landing of the U.S. 45th Division under Admiral Rogers [what a hard case he was!].

Admiral Henry Kent Hewitt, U.S.N., who was my temporary boss on that occasion, was present, arriving in the cruiser *Memphis*, while the French warship *Lorraine*, which had played a goodly part in the Invasion, brought the French Navy Minister. I only wish I had been there with all my friends of Ste. Maxime. What a night at the "Hermitage"!







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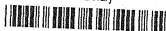
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